

CHARMING IMAGES OF HISTORY: KALBELIYA MEMORIES OF
ITINERANCY, BEGGING, AND SNAKE SERVICES

A Thesis

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ABSTRACT

In the past twenty-five years, the Kalbeliyas of Jaipur, Rajasthan – a formerly itinerant caste-community best known as yogic snake-charmers – have increasingly found work as musicians and dancers in the tourism industry. A few Kalbeliya men in Jaipur continue to work as snake-charmers, however, albeit in significantly altered contexts. This thesis examines Kalbeliya memories of snake-charming, begging, and itinerancy, as well as tourism industry snake exhibition. According to my informants' representations of the past, Kalbeliya methods of begging variously utilize strategies of ritualization and entertainment, which are drawn from repertoires of skilled bodily practice. This repertoire of practice is also utilized in their presentation of various arguments regarding the caste-community. Examining what happens during their arguments, I attempt to demonstrate the processual nature of the Kalbeliya caste-community. Finally, I look at the present-day exhibition of snakes to tourists at the City Palace in Jaipur, indicating its likeness to more prominent Kalbeliya methods of engaging the tourism industry. Although these men distance themselves from methods of snake-charming reliant on ritualized forms of begging, they nevertheless draw from a similar repertoire of practice. Characterizing skilled practice as bodily memory, I argue that these men enact in their body *new* memories of an ancient and essentialized “India,” marketable in a tourism industry which seeks to provide encounters with the exotic. I propose that this re-memorialization of the body draws from what I call “conjoined repertoires” – that is, different repertoires of strategic interaction with distinct genealogies, and that come to be enmeshed in one another – and enacts in Kalbeliyas both new relations of power and the strategic means to negotiate and resist them.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Carter Hawthorne Higgins, and his brother Ross, were raised by their parents, Burt and Cynthia, in Greensboro, North Carolina, USA. During his undergraduate career at Wake Forest University, in Winston Salem, NC, Carter developed an interest in the academic study of religious communities in South Asia, particularly under the mentorship of Drs. James M. Hastings and Jarrod L. Whitaker. Carter traveled to north India twice while at Wake Forest University, both times receiving undergraduate research grants. During these trips, he inquired about Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, and Muslim pilgrimage and ascetic practices, particularly in the Indian states of Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Rajasthan. The title of Carter's honor's thesis at Wake Forest is "Moksha and the Body in the Sannyasa Upanishads," for which the Religion Department awarded him the Currin Medal for best honor's thesis. After graduating from Wake Forest University, Carter came to Cornell University, where he is a Ph.D. student in the field of Asian Religion. After his first year of Ph.D. school, he spent a year in Jaipur, India, studying in the year-long advanced Hindi program at the American Institute of Indian Studies. Based on research from this year Jaipur, this thesis continues certain themes initially encountered in his honor's thesis at Wake Forest, and anticipates some of those in his dissertation proposal. Working under the guidance of Drs. Daniel R. Gold, Anne M. Blackburn, and Durba Ghosh, his doctoral research will consist of an ethnography of ritual specialists, villagers, and pilgrims in two villages in northern Rajasthan: Gogameri and Dadreva.

To Daniel Rosser Higgins, for his humor, critique, and friendship.

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A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION, TRANSCRIPTION, AND PRONUNCIATION

In this thesis, I use diacritics to transliterate Hindi, Rajasthani, and Sanskrit words into the Roman script. In the system of diacritics I use, most consonants are similar to those in English. There are, however, a few exceptions. The English consonants “w” and “v” comprise a single consonant in Hindi; I indicate this with the letter *v*. North Indian languages have four types of *t*’s and six types of *d*’s. Unaspirated dental consonants are given without diacritics (*t* and *d*), as are aspirated consonants, which are followed by an *h* (*th* and *dh*). Retroflex consonants are rendered so: *ṭ*, *ṭh*, *ḍ*, *ḍh*. The remaining two forms of *d* in Hindi are retroflex flaps, and will appear as *ɽ* and *ɽh*. All *c*’s are pronounced as the English “ch,” and *ch* is the aspirated form. Finally, there are two types of Hindi nasals – those made in the same part of the mouth as the following consonant, and the *candrabindu*, the nasalization of the vowel. The former are as follows: *ṇ* before *k*, *kh*, *g*, *gh*; *ṁ* before *j*, *jh*, *c*, *ch*; *ṅ* before *ṭ*, *ṭh*, *ḍ*, *ḍh*; *n* before *t*, *th*, *d*, *dh*; and *m* before *p*, *ph*, *b*, *bh*. The *candrabindu* is rendered as *ṁ*. The vowels are pronounced as follows:

<i>a</i>	as in “about”
<i>ā</i>	as in “father”
<i>i</i>	as in “m
<i>ī</i>	as in “screen”
<i>u</i>	as in “rule”
<i>ū</i>	as in “moon”
<i>ṛ</i>	as in “risky”

<i>e</i>	as in “may”
<i>ai</i>	as in “bat”
<i>o</i>	as in “toad”
<i>au</i>	as in “shawl”

When words in Hindi, Rajasthani, or Sanskrit are given in the text, they generally appear in italics. However, when a word occurs throughout the text, such as *jaṅgal* or *bīn*, it may be un-italicized after its first appearance in each chapter. When my informants used an English word in their interviews, I write the word in its Standard English spelling, and underline it. (Therefore, customer and not *kaṣṭūmar*.) As I conducted the interviews used in this thesis in Hindi, my use of transliteration generally follows the rules for Hindi. This means that the final *-a* in Hindi words also known to Sanskritists will not appear. (Hence, the reader will see *dharm* and not *dharma*.) When I specifically use words in their Sanskrit form, they retain their final *-a*. For example, names of pan-Indic deities appear in their Sanskrit form, such as Śiva and Kṛṣṇa. However, when I attempt to refer to deities in their more local manifestations, distinct from their pan-Indic identities, I reproduce the pronunciation of the Kalbeliyas in and around Jaipur. This is generally followed with the honorific *jī*, which I attach to the end of the name. (Hence, Bherūjī and not Bhairava, Gorakhnāthjī and not Gorakṣanātha, etc.)

Although I generally respect my informants, and refer to them in person by their first name followed by the honorific *jī*, I have not referred to them as such in this text. Additionally, most Kalbeliya men have a distinct first name, “Nāth” as their middle name, and “Saperā” as their last. Women’s names follow this pattern, although they replace “Nāth” with “Devī.” Because all of my informants share the same last name, I have differentiated between them in the thesis by replacing Saperā with name

of their *gotr* (“lineage”). (Hence, Harjīnāth Aṭhvāl and Rājki Devī Derāṇ.) *Saperā* in Hindi is actually *saṃperā*, although Kalbeliyas write and pronounce their name Saperā, without the nasalization. When I refer to Kalbeliya names, I write Saperā; but when I use the Hindi word to refer to a snake-charmer, I write *saṃperā*. Finally, because Kalbeliya appears so frequently throughout the text, I do not write it with diacritics, which is Kābeliyā.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: FIELDWORK, SAMPERĀS, AND NĀTHS

Introduction

Since developing an academic interest in Hindu asceticism, I have spent nearly sixteen months in north India. During this time, I had many discussions regarding asceticism with north Indians who warned of the prevalence of fraudulent ascetics and claimed that the “real” ascetics live in the Himalayas. While scholars in similar social situations may have sought to contextualize and understand such comments as either informed by – or reproductive of – the social field of the speaker, few have asked questions of those directly accused of fraud, i.e. of the sham ascetic.¹ The Kalbeliyas of Rajasthan are among those liable to have been so accused. A formerly itinerant and semi-itinerant community best known for their occupation as snake charmers, the Kalbeliyas are also popularly identified as a Jogī Jāti, or “ascetic caste.” To date, the scholarly publications on Jogī Jāts in north India and Nepal have not provided insight into how this evidence theoretically affects our understanding of Hindu asceticism in general. This may result from the differences between Kalbeliyas and the other Jogī Jātis, on whom these publications were written. For instance, the Nāth Yogīs from the publications of both A. Gold (1988, 1992) and D. Gold (1995, 1996, 1999a, 1999b, 2002), known as Sārāṅgī-vālās (*sārāṅgī* players) to Kalbeliyas, most commonly work in agriculture and, less frequently, as priests in Śiva temples. Even though some Kalbeliyas now work in agriculture, most remember a time when, in contrast to Nāth Yogīs, the normative occupation of the Kalbeliya caste was begging, sometimes with a snake, and sometimes dressed as Hindu renouncers (see Illustration 1). Because they belong to a caste-community with an ascetic identity, and literally *perform* as ascetics

¹ For one exception, see Olivelle (1987), who discusses “sham ascetics” in the *Arthaśāstra*.

while begging, any discussion of Kalbeliya social practice will inevitably face the problems associated with academic portrayals of both the “Hindu ascetic” and the “caste system.”

The South Asian religious ascetic is frequently represented by South Asians and non-South Asians alike through stereotypes. These can take shape as objects of devotion and distrust.² Thusly perceived and hence objectified, the ascetic may lose his or her humanity. While this representation is perhaps understandable, given the rhetoric and self-representation of some South Asian ascetic traditions, the social sciences have recently offered evidenced accounts of humans performing asceticism.³ Still, this turn towards a more human portrayal of asceticism has been recent. By and large, asceticism stands as an “essentialized” image of India in the academy, part of that which Narayan claims to characterize the “dense and deep history of the West’s imaginative encounter with the Other” (1993: 498). An equally ubiquitous representing image of South Asia, and hence its inherent difference from the West, is displayed by the popular (mis)understanding of caste.

For example, T. N. Madan (1987: 1) claims that “Hindu society is best known by caste, its most characteristic institution, and by renunciation, perhaps its best-known cultural ideal.” Madan makes the point that while renunciation is an interesting aspect of “Hindu society” and “permeates the world-view of even the worldly householder, it

² Here, I specifically refer to conversations about ascetics I have had with north Indians and Americans. However, for a comparative study of devotion of the *guru* in northern South Asia, who sometimes is an ascetic, see D. Gold (1987: 174-99). For a more ethnographic presentation of devotion towards the ascetic guru in Rajasthan, see Srivastava (1997:195-207). For distrusts of ascetics, see Olivelle (1987). For distrust and critique of ascetics, particularly of the Nāth order, see various texts attributed to the Sikh Guru Nānak, including Hawley and Juergensmeyer (1988: 63-88) and Nayar and Sandhu (2007). For an introduction to both Rajput devotion to, and British distrust of, Nāths, see Diamond (2000: 14-23).

³ See, for example, Hausner (2007) and Khandelwal (2003).



Illustration 1. Male Kalbeliya ascetic-beggar. Photo by Carter Higgins.

does not bestow its distinctive character upon the everyday life of Hindus.” On the contrary, the central figure in “Hindu society” is the householder who affirms “this-worldly life as the good life,” contrasting with the ascetic (1987: 1-4). Domesticity and renunciation exist simultaneously as (separate) ideologies in Hindu society, evidenced by the emphasis that the Kashmiri Brahmins place on certain aspects of renunciation; however, Madan claims, the two “cannot prevail at the same level” because the non-normal state of asceticism is placed hierarchically above domesticity. On the other hand, “Domesticity for the Hindu is inseparable from a feeling of well-being and happiness, embodying the values of auspiciousness and purity” (1987: 10-11). Madan’s

characterization of “Hindu society” here relies heavily on Dumont’s (1980) antinomious characterizations of the ascetic, or the “individual-outside-the world,” and the householder, or “man-in-the-world” as opposites. Although I will return below to the work of Dumont on caste, it is worth noting here that Dirks argues that Dumont subordinated political and other historical factors to caste in the creation of social identities, communities, and organizations (2001: 4-5, 55-59). Additionally, Dumont “reduced the individual to a position of relative unimportance,” only given “ideological significance when placed outside society” as a renouncer (Dirks 2001: 59).

Dirk’s argument exhibits affinities with that of Inden (1990), who is concerned with showing the ways in which academics have portrayed India as containing “essences” that predetermine not only Indian behavior but also the whole history of South Asian civilization. Indian agency is thus restricted, as is the Indian ability to know these essences. Both Dumont and J. C. Heesterman describe the Indian essences of caste and asceticism as inherently related. Inden claims that J. C. Heesterman, like Dumont, characterizes the “essentialized” Indian system of caste as closely related to asceticism. While Dumont cites hierarchy as the defining quality of Indian society, Heesterman finds as much in renunciation. Inden (1990: 203) refers to Heesterman’s thesis of the “inner conflict” of India’s “tradition” as “individual idealist” because “it depicts the ancient Indian state as the mediator between the transcendent personal value of renunciation and an inherently disorderly world.” Thus, both Dumont and Heesterman locate “caste” and “asceticism” as central to the question of Indian sociology. On the other hand, Inden and Dirks find these terms dominant in the attempts of Western academics and colonial administrators to know and control the subcontinent.

What happens, though, when the theoretical ends to which the subject of asceticism are employed are not the problem? What happens when, regardless of our vision of the ways in which asceticism affects the creation and recreation of social groups in South Asia (or in those Euro-American countries where asceticism is studied academically), the real problem lies in our understanding of the constitution of “asceticism?” For example, how does the married ascetic, the ascetic mother or father of children, the ascetic who sleeps with prostitutes, or the ascetic rapist affect our idea of celibacy as a defining characteristic of asceticism?⁴ How do armies of ascetic warriors and state sponsored ascetic spies and mercenaries dismantle our notions of the Hindu ascetic as “other-worldly,” detached and peaceful?⁵ Are we, along with the north Indians mentioned above, to understand these instances as “sham” asceticism? If so, what, if anything, does this tell us about “real” asceticism? How do these characterizations of asceticism affect the relationship between caste and asceticism? Finally, how do ascetic castes affect our understanding of asceticism, caste, and the relationships therein?

This line of questioning can be reapplied to South Asian social practice in general by extending it to writings on “caste.” In this thesis, I generally refer to a Kalbeliya “caste-community” instead of a “caste” or a “community.” I have made this choice for two reasons. First, Kalbeliyas – and members of other caste-communities – interchange in everyday use the nouns *jāti/jāt* (“caste”), *samāj* (here: “community”; literally: “society”), and *jāti-samāj* (“caste-community”). In what I originally took as a confusion of terms, I heard frequent reference to the Hindu jāti and the Muslim jāti, or the Rajput samāj and the Kalbeliya samāj. Aren’t those backwards? Shouldn’t one speak of a Hindu or Muslim community and a Rajput or Kalbeliya caste instead of the

⁴ For examples, see Pinch (1996), D. Gold (1999), and Diamond (2000).

⁵ See Lorenzen (1978), Pinch (2006), and Olivelle (1987).

other way around? It was in the process of asking myself this question that I realized my mistake – who am I to tell people which terms they should use to describe themselves? I wanted to conduct fieldwork in order to learn about Kalbeliyas, not to critique the logic of their noun-choices. Furthermore, my confusion was based on a desire to fit the world into a model I had read in a book: the caste system exists, Brahmins (or Rajputs) are at the top of it; and former untouchables, such as the Kalbeliyas, are at the bottom. In taking seriously the vocabulary my informants use to represent themselves and the world around them, I begin by looking at the scholarship on caste. Yet, my discussion has another objective. A second trend in this thesis is an attention to a relationship between the individual and the “caste-community,” which I frequently characterize by the employment of several adjective-pairs akin to “generative of and generated by one another,” through which I attempt to argue for the processual nature of both caste and social communities in general.

Caste in South Asia has long intrigued and perplexed scholars, who have sought both to characterize the ways in which caste membership influences behavior, and to determine the historical development of a “system” thought to govern relations between castes. These attempts coalesced in Louis Dumont’s foundational and (in its own time) innovative theoretical approach to caste. Here, we read that “Western” notions of caste in India have suffered from a “sociocentricity,” an insistence on the ideals of egalitarianism and individuality. These are manifest in three distinct ways: a) a “reduction of the religious” aspects of caste hierarchy to “non-religious” factors or representations; b) a focus on one portion of the caste system, instead of its entirety; and c) an ignorance of the principle of hierarchy (Dumont 1966: 32). Attempting to remedy these problems, Dumont argued that what defines the caste system is the “*attribution of a rank to each element in relation to the whole*” – hierarchy – a sociological truth underlying all societies (1996: 2-3, 91 italics in original). In

Dumont's view, this relationship between society and its units is characterized by a ritual opposition between purity and impurity, exemplified at the extremes by Brahmins and Untouchables (Dumont 1966: 42-46). Hence, the division of labor among the various castes is only a secondary consequence of the caste system because the relationship between caste and hereditary labor is merely one of status (Dumont 1966: 92-93).

In an important corrective to Dumont's work, Dirks claims that characterizations of caste based on the ritual and ideological principle of "hierarchy" are historically problematic and rooted in a trend of Orientalist scholarship (2001: 4-5; 56-60). Dumont's insistence on the religious nature of caste takes strength from an "Orientalist vision" of India in which "religion transcended politics, society resisted change, and the state awaited its virgin birth in the late colonial area" (Dirks 2001: 57, 60). Indeed, Dumont's notion of caste serves both as an essential identity of the individual and the group, and as a central part of an unchanging social system inherited from ancient India. Dirks sees these tendencies shared by many authors who deal with caste: although there are differing perceptions and opinions about the nature and moral character of what they see as the "caste system," most authors "accept that caste – a specifically caste form of hierarchy, whether valorized or despised – is somehow fundamental to Indian civilization, Indian culture, and Indian tradition" (2001: 4-5). In doing so, these writers remove caste from its historical and political contexts. Invoking recent studies of the role played by colonial administrators in the reification of social identities and communities, Dirks argues that although the British did not invent caste per se, under British rule caste came to form a "single term capable of expressing, organizing, and above all 'systematizing' India's diverse forms of social identity, community, and organization" (2001: 5). Previous to the arrival of the British, caste was one among many ways – profession, family, ritual community,

class, etc. – in which people were identified. Furthermore, far from a “purely religious” identity, caste as a political designation was “shaped in fundamental ways by political struggles and processes,” and was “part of a complex, conjectural, constantly changing political world” (2001: 13).

Snodgrass uses these two writers, Dumont and Dirks, as the foremost proponents of two perspectives on caste hierarchy in South Asia (2006: 30). Dumont and the first group maintain that Hindus are given a sociologically taxonomic place at birth. Fundamental to caste and hence to “Hindu society” is the famous principle of sorting – hierarchy – and “social inequality and institutionalized discrimination” (*ibid*). To Dumont’s group, Snodgrass retrospectively adds the writings of A. M. Hocart (1950), who also organized his analysis around the ideas of caste as an inherited and ultimate identity.⁶ For Hocart, the organizing and fundamental role played by ritual purity in Dumont’s work is replaced with kingship and patronage. Snodgrass, despite the validity of myriad valid critiques against this model, affirms that profession is hereditary among his informants, and patronage and kingship still regulate hierarchies in certain ways, a perspective particularly fitting for Snodgrass’s work in Rajasthan. However, this is only part of the picture.

In a second group of works dealing with caste, Snodgrass places work by scholars as diverse as Bayly (1988), Cohn (1987), Dirks (1987, 2001), and Inden (1990), which he categorizes as having proposed “that caste never really existed as a traditional system of ranking and affiliation and is instead a British colonial invention” (2006: 32). The colonial government sought to understand Indian society in a taxonomic manner. When documenting cast, colonial officials encouraged Indians to unambiguously link themselves to a single, named caste group and a relatively fixed

⁶ Snodgrass (2006) refers to Dirks (1987; 2001), Parry (1994), and Raheja (1988) as “neo-Hocartians,” because of their location of hierarchy in royal patronage, rather than in ritual purity.

social hierarchy. This documentation was seen as a central distinction for unlocking the social workings of the subcontinent (Snodgrass 2006: 33). In an attempt to utilize this “second interpretation of caste as a historical invention,” Snodgrass indicates the ways in which his informants have created new occupations, perform new identities, and engage in new social hierarchies (2006: 34). The Bhāṭs of Rajasthan remake their caste identities and placement in hierarchies in creative, poetic, and sophisticated ways. By lumping these historians of colonialism together, perhaps Snodgrass draws some hasty conclusions about what the authors are really arguing. For example, Dirk’s argument is not that caste was invented in colonial India, but that it took a more reified form during that period. However, his questions are useful: if caste is historically constituted – or even fictive – then why do Dumont’s and Hocart’s notions of something hereditary and essentialist seem true to social actors in South Asia, and to anthropologists in the field?

Dube has also attempted to reread these writers. Dumont’s model created a set of important binary oppositions, principle among these, in Dube’s work, are “sect and caste” and “householder and ascetics” (1998: 8). Yet, Dube problematizes these by underscoring the fact that certain ascetic communities are interested in maintaining caste affiliations and ritual purity. Furthermore, the Satnāmīs, a religious community comprised of formerly untouchable leather workers known as the Camārs, constitute both a sect and a caste. Contrary to Dumont, another group of scholars comprised primarily by Nicholas Dirks, Gloria Raheja, and Declan Quigley, focus instead on the relationships between caste, ritual, and “cultural attributes of dominance, but tend to locate power, almost exclusively, in constructs of ritually and culturally constituted kingship and dominant caste” (Dube 1998: 10). This model, Dube argues, separates power from religion, a move which finds logical affinities with Dumont and Hocart (*ibid*). Dube thus asks us to locate discussions of caste within their historically

“concrete context,” and draws our attention to the ways in which meaning is constructed and negotiated within culturally defined power-relationships (1998: 12). In Dube’s view, the Satnām Panth contested and negotiated power and domination in multiple spheres.

The meaning of caste, then, is as contingent on historical processes as that of any other social group. Without mentioning any transcendent character of “caste” then, my informants present something of a more accurate picture of their social world when they refer to a Kalbeliya *jāti-samāj*. The shifting and contested meanings and constructions of caste may be observed in recent literature concerned with the decline in professional caste musicians in post-Independence India, the narratives of which resemble those claimed both by Kalbeliyas and by Snodgrass’s Bhāṭṣ. Knight reports that, in the past, the Pardhan caste-community of Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh, made their living by performing epic-narrative songs for their Gond patrons – their *ṭhākurs* (‘master’) or *jajmāns* (‘patron’) – accompanying themselves with their three-stringed fiddle-like instrument (2001: 101-03, 136). Before Indian Independence, Knight claims, Pardhans inherited their performance profession while Gonds inherited their “patronly role” (2001: 109). However, both the Pardhans’ socio-feudal roles as musicians, and the livelihood derived from such an occupation, have changed significantly since Independence and India’s subsequent abandonment of so-called feudal practices. Thompson (1991; 1992) has pointed out similar difficulties for the Cāraṇs and Bāroṭṣ of Gujarat. For example, Cāraṇ lifestyle has changed significantly since independence, particularly because the socioeconomic transition from “feudalism” resulted in the loss of power for those rulers from whom Cāraṇs received patronage. Thompson proposes that the popularity of the themes of Cāraṇ verse has been diminished due to the influence of “Gandhian non-violence and social equality” in Gujarat (1991: 382). On another level, the cohesion of Cāraṇ caste identity recently

faced internal arguments regarding their ancestors, a discussion which for many Cāraṇs directly relates to their self-understanding. Thompson argues that “individual Cāraṇs must reconcile for themselves the differences between the historic role of the caste, the popular image of the caste, the image promoted by caste elders, and their own occupational preferences and prospects” (1991: 383). While many Cāraṇs who work as professional musicians “promote a musical identity for their caste,” citing the musical occupation of their ancestors, many Cāraṇs who work outside the field of music dispute this. Thomson explains that those who argue against the memory of Cāraṇ ancestors as professional musicians are worried about the socioeconomic repercussions of being associated with castes of professional musicians, such as the Langas and Mirs, whose status is significantly lower than that of Cāraṇs (1991: 383-84).⁷ The response from the professional musicians is that, in the past, other musician castes performed at *rāj darbārs* (royal audience) without offering advice, while Cāraṇs had the privilege, due to their respected social status, to give counsel to rulers. For Thompson, both this argument and the fact that many of the musically inclined Cāraṇs have begun “mixing traditional Cāraṇī verses with popular renditions of folk songs,” underscore the point that the Cāraṇs are not a “monolithic social entity that can be unilaterally described” (1991: 384-86). Cāraṇs continue to identify with other Cāraṇs, and view “themselves as a societal group,” albeit of “mixed lineage, economic status, occupation, and region of domicile” (Thompson 1991: 87). Arguments similar to these were current among Kalbeliyas during the period of my research, and will be explored in chapters three and four.

⁷ See Bharucha (2003) for Kothari’s extended discussion of the Langas and Manganiyars, caste-communities of musicians in Rajasthan. For the memories of Mirasis, a Muslim musician and genealogist caste-community in Rajasthan, see Mayaram (1997).

Thompson (1992) also describes the socioeconomic problems facing members of the Bāroṭ caste of Gujarat. Bāroṭs are usually described as musician-performers of epic tales and genealogists to Rājputs. The economic movement away from feudalism, on which “traditional” Bāroṭ relationships with Rājputs were based, “an increase in geographic mobility, and the availability of information reproduction in Western India” have all contributed to a decrease in the demand for Bāroṭ music and genealogies. Thompson claims that the migration of many Gujarati Rajputs, who were once the Bāroṭs’ largest clientele, to East Africa, Europe, and North America, has been particularly devastating for those Bāroṭs working as professional genealogists (usually serving a particular family as the “family *bāroṭ*”) (1992: 1-4). Additionally, some Bāroṭs find the recording of genealogies (*vanśāvalī*) demeaning: an occupation associated with the feudal *jajmāni* system (patron-client relationship) inherently entails a lower status in an older hierarchy. Hence, far from the static, reified categories found in much of the literature on the subject, caste identities and communication are negotiated, reconceived, and argued over in changing historical conditions. Further, the socioeconomic changes in post-Independence South Asia have taken their toll on performance castes, such as those described above, as well as on the Kalbeliyas. Indeed, many informants told me how the changing times have meant a decreased interest in Kalbeliya services.

What might this paper take from these writings? Similar to Snodgrass, and following Dumont – yet attempting to do so critically – we might claim that something of the identity of caste-community is inherited, and locates individuals and groups in situations of various forms of social inequality. Following Dirks, however, we will remain cautious how far back into history we look for this thing we are calling caste-community. With Dirks and Dube, we might affirm that something of caste existed in precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial South Asia. That from precolonial India was

one form among many identity-markers, and might be thought of, in the words of Sudipta Kaviraj (1994: 25), as “fuzzy” but reified during the colonial period. If fuzzy, precolonial caste-identities were made to fit into a constructed “system” as a result of a large assortment of alterations, competition, and chance during the colonial period, only to change significantly in the postcolonial era, then an anthropologist or historian of modern South Asia might ask: how is it that caste remains an important identity, community, or discourse? What sustains, reproduces, and reinvents caste?

In trying to begin addressing some of these questions, as well as those asked above regarding asceticism, this thesis examines the memories of Kalbeliyas in and around Jaipur. Central to this paper are those memories of a time when these social practices both resembled and imitated characteristic practices of various ascetic communities – namely, itinerancy and ritualized begging. The overarching argument of this thesis is that, in the oral performances of memories regarding the narratives of itinerancy, begging, and entertainment, and in the skilled practices which encode new memories of these narratives into the bodies of agents, individual Kalbeliyas are making “arguments” regarding the nature of the Kalbeliya caste-community. Drawing inspiration from practice theoreticians – here Bourdieu, Bell, and Ortner – we might understand an individual’s arguments, made in misrecognized exchange for symbolic capital, as produced in accordance with the individual’s social field and as reproductive of that social field. Using these theoretical modes to form the questions of this paper, I approach the various ways in which Kalbeliyas address the relationships between the past and the present. The first purpose of this work, then, is the presentation of varied and competing representations of the past. From there, these bodies of theoretical literature are returned to, in order to provide some preliminary reflections on the use of these representations in the construction of the Kalbeliya caste-community.

The “body chapters” of the thesis – three, four, and five – are aimed at answering these questions; their answers bind the thesis together. In short, caste-community is reproduced by the individuals it has educated in ways similar to those used by any group. Here, I wish to simultaneously indicate something universal about the relationship between individual and group, and something extremely historicized and contingent on context. While chapter two examines the theoretical literature on memory, defining both ways in which this thesis will use memory to construct its argument, chapters three, four, and five, each present a different method by which the Kalbeliya caste-community creates and is created by individuals. Chapter three addresses Kalbeliya memories of itinerancy, and proposes some ways in which these memories can serve as the ideological justification for various arguments regarding the present and future of the Kalbeliya caste-community. There I attempt to paint a picture of this mutually structured and structuring relationship between the individual and the Kalbeliya caste-community through the “imagining” of the group by using circulated “texts” to argue about the caste-community: the circulation and argumentation seen in this chapter create that which is being argued over. Because these texts are memories, which include individual experiences and representations of the general past, this imagining occurs as a trajectory, beginning with the beginning of time. Chapter four presents memories of Kalbeliya begging, and proposes that the difference between methods is actually a difference in strategy. Seeking to take these representations of the past seriously – to listen to the descriptions of the past instead of reading them for argument – I draw out remembered “strategies” of the skilled practice of begging. Again, these strategies are passed among the members of the caste-community, who belong insofar as they a) can correctly utilize these strategies in the appropriate times and places; *and/or* b) are able to remember these. This chapter connects with the fifth by its location of these strategies in the naturalized and

embodied improvisations in the skilled practices of begging and showing snakes. My main concern in the fifth chapter is this skilled exhibition of snakes to tourists at City Palace in Jaipur. I argue that these practices can be viewed as bodily memory, and that these Kalbeliya men enact new memories in their bodies, which are marketable in the tourism industry and which construct new sets of power relations. Yet, the fifth chapter is more concerned than the others to assess the new combinations of worlds – both global and local – in which Kalbeliya snake-charmers are placed when they create these new bodily memories in the tourism industry. Their negotiations between global and local processes could compliment some of the arguments highlighted in chapter three, particularly those which allude to modern discourses on education and capitalist endeavors. Here, the Kalbeliya caste-community exhibits both tendencies of reproduction and of creative, sophisticated, and not-determined mediation of global historical processes.

Fieldwork

When I began initiating and recording conversations with Kalbeliyas in Jaipur, I had no idea what shape my later questions and Master's thesis would take. In preparation for the thesis, I spent one and a half months of the summer of 2008 in Ithaca, NY, reading academic literature on snakes and religion, and on caste, and writing a paper which I saw as research preparation. During the second half of the summer of 2009 and also in preparation for my thesis, I traveled around north India and Nepal, visiting temples and monasteries associated with a loosely associated community of ascetics and householders, known as the Nāth Sampradāy. My intentions over the summer of 2009 were to obtain a broad background of several aspects of Kalbeliya social practice which were ostensibly central to my thesis. Caste, snakes and religion, and the Nāth Sampradāy were the three categories with which I sought to familiarize myself. When

the summer came to a close, I settled into the AIIS Advanced Hindi Program in Jaipur and spent most of my free time studying Hindi and pursuing friendships with my fellow students, neighborhood residents, and shopkeepers, placing all of my thesis-related endeavors on hold. I had planned to focus my attention nearly completely on my Hindi until the beginning of the second semester in January, at which point I planned to spend weekends and a few afternoons a week with Kalbeliyas. This plan fit the curriculum and schedule of my Hindi course with AIIS. While the first semester of the academic year Hindi course demands energy mostly in-class and at-home, the second semester adds two new requirements: community-interaction and a final paper and presentation. My plans changed, however, and, in mid-November, I became impatient to both spend most of my day in fuller language immersion and to start making contacts among Jaipur's Kalbeliyas. By the beginning of December I had finally mustered enough courage to make these contacts.

On December 6, 2008, I rode my bicycle from my room in Ādārś Nagar to a neighborhood named Kaṭhpūtī Nagar, because several of my teachers at AIIS told me that Kalbeliyas live there. When I arrived, I asked a number of men where the Kalbeliyas live. They all responded that no Kalbeliyas live in Kaṭhpūtī Nagar, which is a settlement only for Kaṭhpūtī-vālās (puppeteers). Finally, I asked if they did not live here, where might I find Kalbeliyas? One man told me that Kalbeliyas live both in Kalākār Colony,⁸ which is quite far from where we were, and Bhojpurā Kaccī Bastī, which was just around the corner. After taking directions to Bhojpurā Kaccī Bastī from this man and politely rejecting his and others' repeated attempts at selling me puppets, I went to Bhojpurā Kaccī Bastī. Having taken directions from several people along the way, I finally arrived in Bhojpurā Kaccī Bastī and took directions from a

⁸ This is a neighborhood in which many Kalbeliya families live, and the site of much of my research. See below.

cigarette vendor, who pointed me to the “large house at the end of the alley,” where one Kalbeliya family lived.

The neighborhood is directly next to the train tracks and the house of the family of Pūraṇnāth and Rājki Devī Saperā is the closest in their row to the tracks. When I arrived on my bicycle, a group of men was seated on construction supplies at the end of the alley, just before the cement fence separating the Bastī from the train tracks. When I asked this group of men if this was the Kalbeliya house, they jumped up, walked hurriedly through the scaffolding and inside the house under construction, telling me that it was a Kalbeliya house, and to come wait at the door. They brought out a man who I would later know as Pūraṇnāth Saperā (see Illustration 2). After I explained that I was a student interested in the Nāth Sampradāy and the Kalbeliya caste, Pūraṇnāth invited me into the first open room, behind the unfinished outer wall, which looked out through the scaffolding onto the unpaved street of the neighborhood. Once inside, he asked me to sit next to him on the bed along the opposite wall, on top of which was a harmonium. Two women, squatting on the floor in between the closest corner to the door and the foot of the bed, hovered around a make-shift kitchen with a stove a small shelf with spices and food. Pūraṇnāth later explained that the kitchen had not yet been built so they were using this area to cook for the time-being. Three children were moving back and forth between the space occupied by the squatting women and a round, red and white carpet on the floor in the middle of the room. Another harmonium was placed on top of this carpet. Behind the head of the bed was more furniture. At one point Pūraṇnāth’s daughter took a drum out from behind the furniture between the head of the bed and the farther corner, and sat and played on the middle carpet.

During this initial meeting, I mostly talked to Pūraṇnāth in Hindi, although his wife Rājki Devī joined the conversation a few times, speaking only in the few English



Illustration 2. Author with Pūraṇnāth Ḍaḡlā and his children, nieces, and nephews, on the stairs in their home. Photo by Yasmine Singh.

phrases she knew. To begin, I explained again that I was currently living in Jaipur for the year, learning Hindi, and that I was a student in the United States, interested primarily in Nāths, and particularly in Kalbeliyas. Pūraṇnāth's initial reaction was to tell me about the accomplishments of his wife Rājki Devī, who he characterized as a famous and world-traveling Kalbeliya dancer. He gave his keys to one of his sons and asked him to bring a folder which was locked under his scooter seat. After the child brought the folder, Pūraṇnāth showed me foreign newspaper and magazine clippings written about and including pictures of his wife and the travel documents from Indian and foreign governments and embassies and cultural organizations, certifying that the “Rajki-Puran Nath Sopera and Party” performance group had indeed traveled to and

performed in many countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, and North America. Additionally there were many pictures of Rājī Devī, Pūraṇnāth, and other performers with many famous Indian film actors and government officials, including Indira Gandhi and Amir Khan. Pūraṇnāth said that Rājī was one of the most famous Kalbeliya dancers. I mentioned that I had heard of a Kalbeliya dancer named Gulābo Saperā, who Pūraṇnāth characterized as number one famous, followed by Rājī Devī, who was number two famous. However, despite her fame and their travel of the world, Pūraṇnāth claimed, they were still poor people and had trouble finding steady work. In the course of our conversation, Pūraṇnāth connected his family's current financial status (which, although he characterized it as dire, far surpassed every other Kalbeliya family I have ever met, save for two) with a curse placed on his community by the powerful and famous medieval Nāth Yogī, Gorakhnāthjī.

In representing his community, Pūraṇnāth summarized the famous narrative of their guru Kanipāvjī's expulsion from the community of Yogīs and curse by Gorakhnāthjī, such that Kanipāvjī, his disciples, and their descendants would remain forever itinerant, without homes in villages, and without crops or fields. Gorakhnāthjī threw a feast for all of his friends and for all of the Nāths, to which Kanipāvjī was invited. He placed begging bowls covered with cloth in front of each attendee and asked everyone to imagine in their hearts what they wanted to eat; through magic, Gorakhnāthjī would make that imagined food appear in the dish. Kanipāvjī wished for snakes and poisonous lizards. When the snakes and lizards appeared, Kanipāvjī was banished from the party. He then had to live in the forest (*jaṅgal*), and there he and his disciples, who eventually became the original members of the Kalbeliya caste, kept all kinds of animals, including snakes, deer, dogs, and rabbits, and ate many kinds of animals from the forest. For a long time Kalbeliyas lived and traveled around the woods, practicing and performing dances, playing the *bīn* (gourd-pipe), and charming

snakes. They had steady work dancing, playing the *bīn* and snake-charming, and were all uneducated and happy.⁹ But forty or fifty years ago some of the Kalbeliyas moved out of the forest and started educating their children. Now Pūraṇnāth wants to send his children to school to learn English. However, this is difficult because he and his wife do not speak English, a fact which also affects their ability to find steady work. Pūraṇnāth claimed that Kalbeliyas now have a desire to send their children school, to educate them in English; they therefore have to do labor (*mazdūrī*), which is preferable to having no work and to dancing and charming snakes.

As I left Pūraṇnāth's and Rājī Devī's home, and while I was riding my bicycle to the apartment of a friend in Tilak Nagar, I was confused about the meeting. My preparation for fieldwork dealt with issues of caste, snakes and religion, and the Nāth Sampradāy, and I was somewhat disappointed that the Kalbeliyas with whom I had my first real conversation, did not work with snakes. They told a story about their guru who was a Nāth *sādhū* requesting snakes from the magical powers of another Nāth *sādhū*. Other than this, however, I felt lost. I initially thought "I came here to talk about their caste, their snakes, and their religion, and all he wanted to talk about was education and speaking English." It was not until a few interviews later that I realized, similar to Pūraṇnāth, many Kalbeliyas recount their caste history along similar lines: a) guru Kanipāvī is cursed; b) the disciples walk around in the *jaṅgal* playing *bīns*, showing snakes, keeping animals, and begging; c) forty or fifty years ago, the disciples moved into houses in villages and cities; they now dance and work in various jobs,

⁹ Pūraṇnāth did not tell me during this first meeting, but there was – and continues to be – a period of "semi-itinerancy," during which children often remained in a settled home or tent or a plot of land in a village, while the parents wandered around, begging. The parents returned home from time to time, bringing begged food and clothing with them.

trying to educate their children. It was in this caste history that I found my interview questions and thesis subject.

When I had first encountered the stories of the Kalbeliya guru Kanipāvji,¹⁰ I was very confused. In these narratives, the arrogant yet under-skilled Kanipāvji is always competing with Gorakhnāthji, whose yogic powers far exceed those of Kanipāvji. Finally, he is kicked out of the group of ascetics. What was so confusing to me about these stories was this: I could not imagine that a community of people would tell “myths” about a revered guru, who was actually just an arrogant antagonist for the real hero. If myth did, as Bruce Lincoln claims, “possess both credibility and *authority*” (1989: 24; emphasis in original), then shouldn’t Kalbeliyas tell a different story? I accepted that this low-caste, low-class community of itinerant snake-charmers could, therefore, possess low positions in sociopolitical hierarchies, but I was certain that the force of hegemony couldn’t sink deep enough into Kalbeliya practice that they reproduced these narratives. Kalbeliyas must, I was convinced, tell a different version of Kanipāvji’s narrative. Hence, when I started conducting interviews, I often asked people about their guru. In order to elucidate some of what I found, and what this meant for my fieldwork, I here give an excerpt of one of the few longer versions of Kanipāvji’s story I heard.

Sādhunāth Derāṇ: We have sayings about Kanipāv, but there is no written record. He is not evidenced (*pramāṇit*) ... There is no writing to prove that Kanipāv ever existed. There is no book written about Guru Kanipāv. I mean, Kanipāvnāth, Macchindarnāth, Jalandharnāth, and Gorakhnāth – all of these existed. But we have writings about Gorakhnāth and Macchindarnāth, but none about Kanipāvnāth. Therefore we don’t know whether he existed or not ... Alright,

¹⁰ For these stories, see Gold (1992: 300-10), Robertson (1996: 281-88), and Digby (2000: 157-60).

now I will tell the story. He was in shit – who? Kanipāv – no, Jalandarnāth. Jalandarnāth was below horse shit.

Pūraṇnāth Ḍaglā: No, he was in the well.

SD: Alright, he was in a well, if you like. But that well was full of horse shit. And Macchindarnāthjī was in Kāṅgrūdeś. Jalandarnāthjī was in the well, below horse shit and Macchindarnāthjī was in Kāṅgrūdeś. He had gone there because he had made arrangements to learn magic. Okay? Now Sāhib, Kanipāvjī and Gorakhnāthjī had an argument. So Kanipāv said “Hey Buddy, if you are such a watchful *guru*, then you must have already made a plan. If you are really such an intelligent *sādhū*, then bring back your *guru*, who has stayed in Kāṅgrūdeś.”

[Gorakhnāthjī replied] “Oh, I’ll bring him back. But, Buddy, your *guru* in a well and has been pressed down under horse shit. So take him out.” At that time he had 67 disciples (*celā*). Who did? Kanipāvnāthjī did.

PD: All of those *celās* were *guru bhāṣ* (“guru brothers,” or initiates of the same guru).

SD: Then he started to take him out of the horse shit. Who did? Kanipāvnāthjī did. Then Gorakhnāth was going. Then later Gorakhnāthjī cracked his loincloth like a whip and [cursing Kanipāvjī’s attempts at digging out Jalandarnāth] said “This sister-fucking whore! Let there be twice as much during the day and four times as much at night.” The amount of horse shit he dug up out of the well was doubled during the day and grew fourfold at night. He created a huge heap, digging and digging, but he still couldn’t find Gurujī.

I here skip all of the details of Gorakhnāthjī's trip to Bengal with a group of itinerant musicians and performers (Naṭṣ), his meeting with and liberation of Macchindarnāthjī, their trip back, and the adventures encountered during that trip.

Sādhunāth Derāṇ: This is what we believe (*mānyatā*), but there is no writing about this. Therefore we do not completely believe it (*har viśvās nahīm*). We hear things like this, but there is no writing. We want to see if we can find a book, brother.

Pūraṇnāth Ḍaglā: We want to know if this is truth. But we can't find that [kind of a book]. For example, [Sādhunāth] is telling the story now. Then I am going to tell it to my children. Then my children are going to tell it to someone else.

SD: This is exactly how it has always been, every since the ancient times. We don't have any evidence of this story ...

There is one saying about the snakes and *pūṅḡṣ*, one saying that is connected to these. What happened was that they all returned. Gorakhnāth brought his *guru* back but Kanipāvnāth's *guru* was still trapped. Gorakhnāth arrived and said “*jay guru mahārāj*” (“victory to the *guru*, the great king.”) [And Kanipāvji said] “*jay guru mahārāj*.” [Gorakhnāthjī said] “I found my *guru*, he is standing right in front of me. Where is yours?”

[Kanipāvji said] “Why are you humiliating me, my brother? Please take my *guru* [out of the well.]” Then [Gorakhnāthjī] cracked his loincloth like a whip and said, “Leave, you sister-fucker” and flew into the sky like a locust; he flew off. After becoming a locust he went into the well and all of the horse shit and everything went flying. Jallandarnāthjī also came out. So the truthful *guru*

was found and there was a large function, a huge feast. Gorakhnāthjī made such a proposition: “Brother, all of the many, shining *sādhus* who are here will acquire the food that they desire.” Everyone had dishes placed in front of them, which were covered. Then whatever food they desired appeared in front of them. Our *guru* asked for poison. [Somebody said] “You jerk (*sālā*), where will he get that?”

PD: Our *guru* lied [and said] “I want snakes and *ghoīrās* (large lizard).¹¹

SD: He saw that he got what he wished for. By doing that, he dishonored [Gorakhnāthjī]. He left that association [which told him] “Leave, you sister-fucker. You won’t have a house in the village or fields for agriculture in the *jaṅgal*. You will always wander about aimlessly.” Therefore, brother, we are among his.

PD: Our *guru* was crazy.

In this animated account of the narrative of Kanipāvjī, which was a more detailed fleshing-out of the same narratives I read before my fieldwork, and which I heard occasionally during my fieldwork, both Sādhunāth and Pūraṇnāth continuously invoke an uneasy ambivalence regarding the nature of oral transmission. While this indicates more about the personal dispositions of the interviewees than it does about their guru, once combined with the ambivalence about Kanipāvjī’s actions at the end, an answer to my query about hegemony in myth takes shape. In the beginning of my fieldwork, I

¹¹ The words *ghoīrā* and *cīpaṭ* refer to the same large animal. Neither word is listed in either McGregor’s (1992) Hindi-English dictionary, nor in Sakariya’s (1984) Rajasthani-Hindi dictionary.

was continuously disappointed by all of those individuals who told me that they didn't know anything about Kanipāvji. In fact, not only were a majority of my informants unaware of the stories about Kanipāvji, he did not figure into any of their ritual practice: no one performed worship of Kanipāvji; no one sang his praises at Kalbeliya *jāgaraṣ* ("all-night *bhajan* singing parties"); and no one hung pictures of Kanipāvji in their home-shrines; etc. I discovered that basically the only time people referenced Kanipāvji in my presence was when they were explaining their remembered practices of itinerancy and begging. Like my initial encounter with Pūraṇnāth, many Kalbeliyas located the origin of their caste-community in the curse that Kanipāvji received from Gorakhnāthji; from then on, Kalbeliyas wandered around in the *jaṅgal*, living in tents, hunting, and showing poisonous animals in the villages, as part of their begging practices. For my informants, the narrative of Kanipāvji had no hegemonic reach because it wasn't all that important. What's more, because Kalbeliyas had, for the most part, abandoned these practices, they had no use in referring to Kanipāvji amongst themselves. With this realization, then, I did the responsible thing and listened to my informants: I stopped asking about Kanipāvji so much.

The period of my fieldwork can be thought of in two parts. During the first part, from December 2008 through the middle of March 2009, I spent the majority of my research time in Bhojpurā Kaccī Bastī, although I also made frequent trips to the City Palace complex. The second portion of my research, from the middle of March 2009 through the end of June 2009, I spent most of my time in Kalākār Colony. In addition to being split spatially and temporally, I generally conceive of these two research periods as occurring under the tutelages of different men and their wives and children. For the first half, I voiced my research interests to and followed the lead of Pūraṇnāth Ḍaglā, referred to above. For the second half of my research, I did the same with Kālūnāth Aṭhvāl, who became my paid research assistant. For the periods

of my research, I considered both of these men close friends. I here attempt to describe both a) my relationships with the two men, including the roles they played in my conduction of research, as well as b) their respective neighborhoods and how those areas as place affected my research. In keeping with the chronology of the narrative of my fieldwork, I begin in Bhojpurā Bastī with Pūraṇnāth Ḍaglā.

Pūraṇnāth Ḍaglā lives with his wife Rājki, and their five children, in Bhojpurā Kaccī Bastī, in Jaipur's Bāis Godām neighborhood. In total, there are four Kalbeliya households in Bhojpurā Kaccī Bastī, all of whom are directly related to Pūraṇnāth and Rājki: the family of Pūraṇnāth's deceased older brother Antarnāth; the family of Pūraṇnāth's older twin brother, Rāmjināth; and Dharmnāth and Gītā's house, the brother-in-law and sister of Rājki. There were two residential shifts during the period of my fieldwork: a few months after I had been hanging out in Bhojpurā Bastī, Pūraṇnāth's younger brother, Jagdīśnāth, his wife Mevā, and their children moved from Kalākār Colony into Pūraṇnāth's house. The second relocation occurred after the separation of Rājki's sister Gītā from her husband Dharmnāth: Gītā moved out of Bhojpurā Kaccī Bastī, and in with her parents in a nearby village. Other than his family, Pūraṇnāth said that other Kalbeliya families used to live in Bhojpurā Bastī, where Kalbeliyas have held land for the last thirty years, but who some time in 2008 had moved seven or eight kilometers away to the railway boundaries, onto land given to them by the government. Besides Kalbeliyas, Pūraṇnāth estimated that some three hundred and fifty families live in Bhojpurā Kaccī Bastī. Of these, the Kalbeliyas mixed well with the members of the Nāth Jogī caste of A. Gold's (1988; 1992) and D. Gold's (1996, 1999) work, whom the Kalbeliyas called both *Sārāṅgī-Vālās*, those who play the *sārāṅgī*, a bowed string instrument, or the "Disciples of Gorakhnāthji." Additionally, the Kalbeliyas of Bhojpurā Kaccī Bastī were close friends with the family of a Muslim

magician named Lāl Bhāī, and the family of a Bhopā (non-Brahmin priest) named Kesar Lāl.

Pūraṇnāth was the director of the Kalbeliya performance ensemble – referred to generally by Kalbeliyas with the English phrase “Dance Party” – “Rājki-Pūraṇ Nāth Saperā and Party,” in which he also played the harmonium. His wife, Rājki, was among the first group of Kalbeliyas to travel to the United States for a performance. The most famous Kalbeliya dancer, a woman named Gulābo (or Gulābī) Saperā, had taken Rājki along when Rājki was only thirteen years old. Pūraṇnāth was generally respected among Kalbeliyas in and around Jaipur. The Kalbeliyas who disagreed morally with the profession of Dance Parties, too, rarely spoke ill of Pūraṇnāth in public. Hence, he was able to approach nearly any man in the community, asking if I might take their interview. Pūraṇnāth introduced me to a great number of people, including Kānnāth Derāṇ, the *sarpaṇc sāhib*,¹² and Sant Śrī Mahādevnāthjī, the best known of the Kalbeliya *gurus* around Jaipur. While he managed to introduce me to many influential Kalbeliyas at a small number of functions to which I accompanied him, we spent most of our time together in his house. In the beginning of my fieldwork, I preferred spending time in Bhojpurā Bastī to Kalākār Colony, because the number of Kalbeliyas who lived in the former was much smaller than those living in the latter. Eventually, however, I began to feel that my time would be better spent in Kalākār Colony. Pūraṇnāth frequently wanted to talk to me about organizing concerts for him and his wife in the United States and Europe. Additionally, I frequently ran into the problem of the television; whereby, completing five or ten minutes of pleasantries after my arrival, everyone’s attention turned to whatever Bombay film was playing on the television. Additionally, Pūraṇnāth was wary of my talking to

¹² Most Kalbeliyas always refer to Kānnāth as *sarpaṇc sāhib*, hence, I will also do this in the paper, instead of only using *sarpaṇc*, by itself.

others in Bhojpurā Bastī, especially with his twin brother, Rāmjināth. Finally, after Pūraṇnāth had schemed to ensure our continued relationship (which I will not discuss here), I diverted my attentions entirely to Kalākār Colony, in which direction they had already started to drift. Despite the intense negative reaction I had to the aforementioned scheme, Pūraṇnāth and I remained on amicable terms, and my gratitude for his help during those months is lasting.

The day after I met Pūraṇnāth for the first time, I went to City Palace because I had plans to meet Harjināth Aṭhvāl, from Kālvār village. On that day, however, Harjināth had not come to Jaipur for work. Instead, his paternal cousin, Kālūnāth Aṭhvāl, was showing snakes there. I sat with Kālūnāth for a few hours that day and interviewed him. He struck me as someone genuinely uninterested in my foreign-ness, but nonetheless warmly yet reservedly sociable. Over the next few months, while I was spending most of my time with Pūraṇnāth, I continued to visit with Kālūnāth and his family, both at City Palace, and at his home in Kalākār Colony. At some point during March, I started spending a lot of time with Kālūnāth and his family (see Illustration 3). Kālūnāth was nearly 15 years younger than Pūraṇnāth, so did not possess as much prestige as the later. Yet, even Kālūnāth's elders seemed to respect his honesty, unwillingness to engage in arguments or feuds, and his indispensable knowledge of and leadership in community rites, among which his specialty was marriages. Even more than Pūraṇnāth, Kālūnāth became a close friend of mine.¹³

Towards the end of April 2009, when our friendship was cemented and after everyone began to call me the little brother of Kālūnāth, I asked Kālūnāth to be my paid research assistant. Because there were around sixty Kalbeliya families living in

¹³ In fact, when we traveled to Nepal together to visit the family of my romantic partner, Yasmine Singh, her cousin, Rajesh Manandhar, said our names ought to replicate our inseparability. Hence, we were Kālūnāth and Gorenāth (literally, the Black Nāth and the White Nāth)!



Illustration 3. Kālūnāth and Jānkī Devī Aṭhvāl in front of their home. Photo by Yasmine Singh.

Kalākār Colony, almost all of which were supported by the women and girl dancers of the household, I knew I needed help. One of Kālūnāth's greatest assets to me as a research assistant was his knowledge of Kalākār Colony, and in facilitating interviews with its residents. Perhaps more importantly, however, he made interviewees feel comfortable, and restated my questions in a more natural mixture of Hindi and Rajasthani. Kālūnāth and his family (wife, children, but also brother's, sisters-in-law, etc.) did not, for the most part, work in Dance Parties because of moral objections. Despite this, Kālūnāth was just as helpful in interviews about Dance Parties as he was in interviews about begging and itinerancy.¹⁴ Kālūnāth was an indispensable research

¹⁴ Due to constraints in space in this thesis, I do not discuss Dance Parties in any detail.

assistant and continues to be an indispensable friend: we still talk on the phone once every few weeks.

Kalākār Colony, located in an area of Jaipur known as Pānī Pec, is a neighborhood owned by the government (see Illustration 4). Fifteen to twenty years ago, groups of semi-itinerant performers were squatting on land near the Brass Factory in Bāñī Park, Jaipur. Many Kalbeliyas, including Kālūnāth and his family, lived in tents alongside members of other semi-itinerant caste-communities of performers, specifically Naṭṣ-Kaṭhpūtli-vālās and Rāñā-Ḍholīs. When this land was needed by the wealthy for other purposes, the government rounded up these semi-itinerant, squatting performers, piled their belongings into trucks, and bought them to the neighborhood then known as Pānī Pec Kaccī Bastī, what is now Kalākār Colony. Each nuclear family was given an empty plot of land and a government document stating that this plot was to belong to this family until the government needed it back, at which time this family would be given another plot of land elsewhere. For many years, these communities lived in tents on their plots, stealing electricity needed for lights and fans. By the time I arrived on the scene, most families had built permanent structures, and the government had brought in water and electricity lines, and had paved the alleys. Because the majority of the residents of Pānī Pec Kaccī Bastī were performers in some capacity, this became a hot spot for musicians and dancers following the creation of Dance Parties in the mid-90's. With the rising popularity and success of these performance ensembles, Kalbeliyas, Naṭṣ-Kaṭhpūtli-vālās, and Rāñā-Ḍholīs earned enough money to build homes out of brick and concrete. Additionally, this neighborhood was renamed Kalākār Colony, the Artists' Colony. Since then, some performers who greatly succeeded in the tourism industry have either built better homes or have moved elsewhere. In the place of the latter have come members of various other communities, such as Brahmans, Muslims, Sindhis, Bengalis, and



Illustration 4. Entrance to Kalākār Colony. Photo by Yasmine Singh.

Biharis. Many Kalbeliya families rent extra rooms to families of Bihari and Bengali migrant workers. The neighborhood is divided into sections, mostly into areas originally occupied by one of the original three residential caste-communities. Each of these neighborhood portions has their own temple, although everyone claims that anyone can go into any temple. The Kalbeliya portion is the site of a Rāmdevjī temple, who is the favorite deity of many of the resident Kalbeliyas.

With this description of the conditions of my fieldwork, then, I now present a literature review on *saṃperās*.

Snake-Charmers in Academic Literature

The snake charmer serves as a rather frequent symbol of “exotic India,” and as such is a popular image in various forms of media. Despite such visibility, the snake charmer is under- and misrepresented in academic literature. A review of the problems with each text (although there are only a few published) would be too tedious a task and is not the concern of the current undertaking. Hence, many of the analytic problems of the first text examined will be taken as paradigmatic of the rest.

Despite its highly problematic methods of inquiry and analysis,¹⁵ Ray’s (1986) ethnography of ten Savara villages in Midnapore District, West Bengal, provides readers with useful and interesting ethnographic data pertaining to the social, economic, and ritual practices of a semi-nomadic, low caste, tribal Hindu community of snake-charmers. Ray’s work focuses on Savara villages situated just outside larger

¹⁵ Most of Ray’s historical and textual claims are presented without evidence or citation (1986: 12-19). For example, he gives an account of how the Savara, originally a forest dwelling tribe as “food-gathers and hunters” were forced, by deforestation, to turn to snake charming for sustenance (1986:44). Additionally, he continuously asserts that the Savaras are an “ancient tribe” who are referenced in the Veda, “Epic literatures,” and “folk literatures.” However, he gives no verse citations and attempts no indication that the Savaras of these ancient Sanskrit texts are connected in any way with the Savaras of the ethnography. Secondly, Ray characterizes the four *gotras* (clan) as “totemic” cults and gives their respective totemic objects, then claims that the majority of the members of three of the four *gotras* neither possess a totemic object, nor do they “observe any taboo or prohibition” connected with the given totemic objects (1986: 62-62). Thirdly, Ray mentions other caste groups in Bengal, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, and Karnataka which he says “claim themselves as ‘Savaras’” (1986: 175-78). The author, however, without giving any explicit reason, takes snake charming to be the defining characteristic of true Savara identity, and attributes the claims of these other caste groups to their adoption of a “generic” *gotra* name during the process of “Hinduisation” of tribal groups. Lastly, and most problematically, working from a strictly Durkheimian understanding of religion, Ray generally refers to all ritual practices as “magico-religious practices” (see p. 175), which he explains through reference to beliefs (1986: 128-158). As this problem is particularly important for this paper, it will be addressed in the text.

villages inhabited by various and intermingled castes, in which the Savara families speak a local dialect with similarities to Bengali and Oriya, and who claim descent from Oriya forest-dwelling communities (1986: 1-6, 34). Most adult male members of the Savara caste earn their livelihood through the catching and charming of poisonous snakes, while most adult women of the Savara caste beg, construct and sell floor mats, and oversee domestic work (1986: 34, 58-59). Two of Ray's discussions of snakes in Savara social fabric will be particularly helpful for this section of the paper: a) economically, Savara communities are generally supported by the catching and charming of snakes; b) Manasā, the goddess of snakes, is important in ritual and narrative as the object of daily household and larger community practice (Ray 1986: 35, 147-153). Let us first deal with snake catching and charming.

According to Ray (1986: 48-50), groups of six to ten adult Savara males leave their villages in autumn for forests, rivers, and paddies for up to a month, searching for snakes. When catching a snake, the Savaras "utter some incantations or magical spells" which Ray explains are "believed to make snakes immobile" (1986: 49). Then, "in the meantime they run towards the snakes with some herbs and roots," because again they are "believed to numb their habit of biting" (*ibid*). After the administration of "medicinal plants," the snake's throat is held to the ground with a long bamboo stick, the catcher presses down the tail with the left hand and then with the left leg, and the catcher finally grabs the head of the snake with the hand, putting it into a lidded vessel. Here, Ray's ascription of causality between belief and action is problematic. Firstly, if the Savara snake catchers believed that snakes could be rendered immobile by the use of "incantations" or "magical spells," then why would they need to "run towards" them? By definition, one does not need to chase an immobile object. Hence, there must be another way to explain the use of "incantations" in snake trapping. Secondly, this paper rejects the argument that

medicinal plants used in the catching of the snake are believed to “numb [the snake’s] habit of biting” (1986: 49). Again, if the catchers believed that medicinal plants had such an effect on snakes, there would be no need for restraining the serpent. These explanations through belief, as well as most of Ray’s analyses of “magic” (1986: 129-43)¹⁶ and “worship” of various goddesses (1986: 147-58) indicate a reliance on theoretical suppositions similar to those which Douglas (1966: 58) refers to as “old anthropological sources,” which are “full of the notion that primitive people expect rites to produce an immediate intervention in their affairs.”¹⁷

As stated above, the main source of income for Savara adult males in the villages Ray discusses is the catching and charming of snakes. While the author notes that some individuals sell their captured snakes and extracted venom to “laboratories” where the snakes and venom are “used for research purposes, the snakes are most

¹⁶ For a comprehensive study of the use of “magic” as an analytical category in Western academic traditions, see Styers (2004).

¹⁷ Contrarily, Douglas proposes an analysis of ritual and belief as symbolic communication of social boundaries and group concerns. However, following Bell (1992: 81-91), instead of approaching ritual as either only instrumental (Ray) or symbolic (Douglas), this paper is more concerned with situationally specific “strategies” of “ritualization” through which the action under investigation “establishes a privileged contrast, differentiating itself as more important or powerful” than other social actions. These strategies directly indicate the relationship between the “social body” and a “symbolically constituted spatial and temporal environment,” mediated by what Bell, building on Bourdieu (1977), calls “ritual mastery,” or an unacknowledged and sub-discursive “practical mastery of the schemes of ritualization as an embodied knowing, as the sense of ritual seen in its exercise” (Bell 1992: 93, 98-101, 107-08). Hence, the recitation of incantations and the use of spatially and temporally specific objects in the capturing of snakes strategically distinguish the act of snake catching from other social actions. Similarly, J.Z. Smith (1989: 103, 109) might argue that these actions and objects draw “interest” to the action of snake catching; they are an “assertion of difference.” The Savaras’ use of snakes and strategies of distinction are carried to larger audiences after the snake is caught, de-fanged, and appropriately trained.

frequently trained and charmed” (1986: 50-51).¹⁸ Despite the fact that the author proposes snake charming as the central defining characteristic in Savara identity, only about a page of description of their method of charming is given: Snake charmers travel both individually and in groups, and both to other villages, where they approach households door to door, and to nearby urban areas, in which they set up and charm snakes in or near markets. During the performance, charmers first irritate the snakes, who in turn raise their hoods and attempt to strike and bite the charmer. Some charmers play small hand drums and sing various songs associated with both the goddess Manasā and with charming itself. In return, passers-by donate rice, vegetables, and money to the performers.

Suffering from most of the same analytical problems as Ray, Mohanty’s account of the Sapua Kela (1982), a nomadic community of snake charmers from Patia, Orissa, describes and analyzes the group predominantly in terms of their nomadic wandering. Very little information about their snake charming is presented, and the little data presented is analytically problematic. For example, despite the fact that Mohanty discusses the Sapua Kela as a caste, which is usually followed with some assumption of inherited identity or occupation (or at least a systematic explanation of social education), he discusses snake charming as a collective “choice” (1982: 151-52). Furthermore, Mohanty uses morally-biased language with which to characterize Sapua Kela practice and motives, and to hypothesize audiences’ mental reactions to performances:

¹⁸ In fact, there is no “training of snakes.” The snakes already react fearfully of quickly moving objects, and are sensitive to vibrations in the ground. Both of these fears are exploited in the act of snake-charming, during which the frightened snake flares its hood, and moves its head, following the movement of the snake-charmer’s hand and bīn, which pose threats to the snake.

One vital aspect of snake charming is that it creates an impression in the mind of the spectators that the snake-charmers have some amount of magical powers or are protected by herbal medicines. This gives a Kela a wide scope to practice a variety of deceptions and helps him to sell their pseudo-medicines. (Mohanty 1982: 152)

Despite the problems with its presentation, Mohanty's work helps us point out a number of interesting aspects of the Sapua Kela caste which parallel Kalbeliya practice. Firstly, the Sapua Kela are a low-caste group of hereditary, itinerant snake charmers who have their own language, known as *do bhaka bangle*, all mirrored in the case of Kalbeliyas (Mohanty 1982: 150). Secondly, in addition to snake charming, caste members also engage in healing and sale of medicine as well as the sale of snakes and poison to zoos and chemical laboratories. With the exception of the last of these, Kalbeliyas engage in similar activities. There are also, however, significant differences with the Kalbeliyas. For example, while Kalbeliyas in Rajasthan have settled into established, plotted homes, Mohanty claims that the Sapua Kela vehemently reject any sedentary lifestyle (1982: 152). This may, however, present only a problem of timing; perhaps in the early 1980's, many itinerant Kalbeliyas, too, would have rejected such a settled lifestyle. Additionally, the Sapua Kela are the lowest sub-caste of the other Kela sub-castes, none of who will accept water from them (1982: 155). According to Robertson, the Chabṛivāle (basket makers) and Cakkivāle (grinding-stone makers) are Nāth sub-castes lower than Kalbeliyas (1998: 12). Finally, while women from both snake-charming castes may practice begging on certain socially appropriate occasions, the women of the Sapua Kela caste work as tattoo artists, while Kalbeliya women do not (Mohanty 1982: 152).

Another description of snake-charming practice in Orissa is found in Panda (1986). In western Orissa, a religious community known as the Nāgbāchchā accepts

tribal and low-caste individuals into their fold, although most of those who are accepted are “the male heirs of the snake charmer and snake worshippers (like the *ojhā*, *jhānker* or *pūjhārī*)” (Panda 1986: 39). Once initiated, members become *guṇī* (literally “skilled”), or curer of snake bites (Panda 1986: 40). The initiation ceremony includes an extensive *pūjā*,¹⁹ and its cycle happens every year. After seven years, a member becomes perfected (*sidkhiā*, which the author claims to come from Sanskrit *siddha*),²⁰ and is able to serve as a *guru*. Once fully initiated, however, members of the Nāgbāchchā become, at least on a semi-professional level, yoked to the tasks of catching and releasing of poisonous snakes that have intruded into the village, performing traditional death rituals for dead snakes found, curing snake bites, and “ward[ing] off the evil spirits from the village” (Panda 1986: 42).

Our final group of snake charmers is the Nāth Jogī Saṃperās of north India. That Nāths would engage in snake charming would not surprise White, who claims “numerous Nāth Siddhas are known for their ability to control (and charm) serpents, yet another metaphor for their mastery of the female *kuṇḍalinī*, and for their ability to treat poisons as elixirs” (1996: 222).²¹ While high class yoga metaphors and allusions

¹⁹ During the first day, initiates fast and perform Śiva *pūjā* at a Nāgbāchchā Koṭighar, or a small village temple where offerings are usually performed every Monday by a priest. Thus *pūjā* lasts for six days, during which the *guru* gives *mantras* to the initiates. No one fasts, though they all abstain from meat and intoxicants. There is a large *pūjā* on the seventh day, at the Koṭighar, then at a body of water, then at a Śiva temple (Panda 1986: 41). Then everyone goes back to the village where they have a large ceremony including dancing and feasting. This is followed by another *pūjā* at the Koṭighar. On the eighth day there is another water *pūjā*, a goat sacrifice, and a feast, just before which the *guru* distributes medicines which are swallowed by the initiates.

²⁰ For Nāths as Siddhas, see White (1996).

²¹ White’s endnote to this section reads: “Gūgā Chauhan or Gūgā Pīr, whom the Nāth Siddhas claim to have been one of their number, is renowned for his power over serpents...Nepali legend maintains that Gorakhnāth held back the ‘great serpents’ of the rains in Nepal for some twelve years, a reference that

to the *Rgveda* may make sense to a medieval Sanskrit textual studies scholar in the context of Nāth Jogī Saṃperās, individuals acquainted with the low caste Saṃperās of north India may be slower to accept such connections. Professional snake-charming Saṃperās travel around the countryside, and occasionally in larger cities (though less frequently since the Wildlife Act of 1972, which made illegal the trapping and possessing of wild animals in city limits), to famous pilgrimage sites and occasionally into Nepal and Myanmar, showing their snakes – predominantly black cobras – which are kept in round bamboo baskets, and playing their bīns, or gourd flutes, which they make (Briggs 1938: 59; Dhutt 2004: 17).²² Saṃperās are street musicians who beg for alms during snake-charming and bīn-playing performances, either door to door in villages or in crowded markets in more densely populated areas. Kalbeliyas, too, are Nāth Jogī Saṃperās; but only in the Indian state of Rajasthan are Nāth Jogī Saṃperās known as Kalbeliyas.

Robertson mentions that elders of certain Kalbeliya families in Jaipur had procured loose contracts with resort hotels for entertainment performances for tourists (1998: 119-20). The hotel management did not pay nor charge the Kalbeliyas overhead for their performances, instead, they allowed the Kalbeliyas to accept donations from the tourists. While Kalbeliyas described their exhibition of cobras at luxury hotels as begging, Robertson argues that this should be categorized as performance, because the tourists are “paying for entertainment” (1998: 119). During the time of my fieldwork, Kalbeliyas were no longer allowed to show their snakes in

at once harks back to Vedic myths of Indra taming the rain serpent Vṛtra and to Gorakh’s yogic control of the *kuṇḍalinī*” (White 1996: 466 n.22).

²² Both Briggs (1938) and White (1996) refer to Saṃperās as “Sapelas,” which is their name in certain north Indian regional languages and dialects, particularly in Himachal Pradesh.

tourist hotels, and referred to their work as both showing art (*kalā dikhānā*) and as begging (*māṃgnā, bhikh māṃgnā*) (see below, Ch. 5).

In addition to tourist hotels, Samperās engage in other work related to their occupation as snake-charmers. For example, Dutt has focused on their role as traditional village healers, mainly of snakebite related illness (2004: 41). While Dutt found that the herbal medicines used for snakebite seems to be effective only in its “psychological support” – its “placebo effect rather than any anti-venom qualities” – the herbal medicines used for more “common ailments such as a stomach ache, skin diseases, etc.” do seem to have some “medical basis” (Dhutt 2004: 41). Furthermore, Dhutt claims that “traditional medicine is a significant aspect of culture and livelihoods of snake charmer communities” and that “traditional medicine is often as important as snakes to the community, the two professions are often inseparable.” While Robertson (1998: 140-46) affirms that the Kalbeliyas work as healers for victims of snakebite and “minor physical ailments in adults,” she claims that they mainly treat children for illnesses attributed to the “evil eye” (*būri nazar*) and “evil spirit” (*būri ātmā*). This is done through the recitation of various *mantras* and the gift of specific “protective metal armlets or bracelets” (*ibid*). Kalbeliyas also assist in exorcism of *prets* (“ghosts”) at Bherūjī temples. Some of Robertson’s Kalbeliya informants told Robertson that most “possessed” persons were actually usually suffering from TB or domestic problems. In an attempt to explain this discovery, Robertson argues that

despite their reservations about the reality of the supernatural causes of certain conditions, it would be wrong to suppose Kalbelia healers are merely cynical exploiters of their patients. They know healing processes can often be effected or at least helped by the ventilation of the sick or ‘possessed’ person’s grievances, or demands for better treatment, attention and understanding. (1998: 146)

While I met some Kalbeliyas outside of Jaipur who were healers and exorcists of various types, none of my Kalbeliya informants in Jaipur, however, served as such.

Dhutt claims that Nāth Jogī Saṃperās living outside Rajasthan earn livings by the manufacturing, selling, and performing the bīn and other Saṃperā instruments, including the “*tumba* (small drum-like object with one string), the *khanjari* (tambourine)²³ and the *dhol* (big drums)” (2004: 17-18). With the exception of Rajasthani Kalbeliyas, apparently, Dhutt’s informants claim that in the last twenty to thirty years, since the criminalization of snake charming, Nāth Jogī Saṃperās have been earning by participation in what Dhutt refers to a “*Been Party*,” a professional musical performance at a wedding or other celebrations by a group of seven Saṃperās with various instruments (2004: 17). Despite Dhutt’s comments, the Kalbeliya Dance Parties are far more successful than the “*Been Parties*” of Saṃperās from other states in north India. I have seen both perform, and they are quite different. The “*Been Party*,” whose performance I witnessed, consisted of a group of Saṃperā men from Haryana state, all dressed in ochre-colored *kurtā-pājāmā* playing *bīns*, *ḍaphlīs*, and *tumbās*. Kalbeliya Dance Parties include men playing all of these, plus others: one playing a harmonium and singing, the other (usually a man from the Rāṇā-Ḍholī caste-community) playing the *ḍholak*. While these men play Rajasthani “folk”²⁴ music of several varieties, two or three women perform the accompanying dance. Because several dances include certain acrobatics, a Kalbeliya man, dressed as a “traditional” Bañjārā (male dancer from a caste-community that traditionally produces salt) also dances, helps the female dancers with their acrobatics, and blows fire.

²³ The *khañjaṛī*, or *ḍaphlī*, is not a tambourine; it is a small, round, wooden drum, covered with the skin of a large lizard.

²⁴ Not only are Kalbeliya Dance Parties marketed as “folk” performances, many Kalbeliyas refer to their own style with the English word “folk.”

An important peculiarity of the Nāth Jogī Saṃperās, when compared with the other caste-communities of snake charmers described above, is their yogic identity. Their ochre colored clothes, the burial of their dead, their connections with the Nāth Sampradāy through their guru Kanipāvjī; all these are markers of social identity are equal in importance to their cobras and bīns. Hence, it is now necessary to examine some of the literature related to the Nāth Sampradāy in Rajasthan.

Nāth Jogīs in Rajasthan

The area now known as Rajasthan has long-standing associations with the Nāth Sampradāy. In an excellent textual study of medieval tantric and alchemical sources, White (1996: 90-95) uses the term “Nāth *sampradāya*” to designate an institutionalization of Nāth Siddhas sometime after the death of Gorakhnāth, who probably lived between 12th- and 13th- centuries in northwestern India, around what is today the state of Rajasthan. There is pan-South Asian evidence, before the 12th century, of important religious lineage-leaders whose names ended with *-nātha*, (lineage lists usually begin with Ādinātha, Śiva), who generally represent some form of medieval Śaivism, usually Western Transmission. However, in the late 12th- to early 13th- centuries, many references to Gorakhnāth appear, leading White to conclude that a historical figure named Gorakh must have lived and participated in the religious synthesis of Nāth Siddhas into the Nāth Sampradāy, during this time. Such an institutionalization, or a synthesis, for White, included the loose formation and “Gorakh-ization” of many Śaiva ascetic lineages, indicated by: a) a conflation of the historically probable person of Gorakh with previous, “legendary or divine figures named Gorakh or Gorakṣa”; b) veneration of one of various lists of “Nine Nāths,” in which the lineage head was located and whose central figure was frequently Gorakh;

c) “the appearance of a ‘canon’ of literature on the technical and experimental aspects of *haṭha yoga*” (White 1996: 90-95).

There is evidence of the continued influence of the Nāth Sampradāy in Rajasthan. For example, Mān Singh, the Mahārājā of the Rajput kingdom of Jodhpur from 1803 until 1841, was a disciple of a celibate (*sādhū*) Nāth Jogī named Ayas Dev Nāth, who had prophesied the death of his cousin and enemy, Bhīm Singh. After Mān Singh ascended the throne, Dev Nāth, and the Nāth jogīs in general, wielded tremendous power and accumulated great wealth and numbers in the areas around Jodhpur. Mān Singh’s relationship with the Nāth was mutually beneficial: his religious and political identities were supported by his devotion to and patronage of the Nāths, and in return the Nāths received from him power and wealth (D. Gold 1995: 120-128; Diamond 2000). However, there are not many other sources dealing with Nāth *sādhus* in Rajasthan,²⁵ perhaps due to a decline in “wild” asceticism (van der Veer 1987); most recent inquiries have examined the householder Nāth Jogīs of Rajasthan (A. Gold 1988, 1992; D. Gold 1996, 1999a, 1999b, 2002).

Householder (*gṛhastī*) Nāth Jogī communities do share certain social markers with Nāth ascetics (*nāgā*). For Nāth householders, the “orange of the sadhus’ robes” known as *bhagvā*, “become the color of the householder’s tunic and turban, the normal Rajasthani peasant dress”(A. Gold 1992: 41; D. Gold 1999a: 73). In many cases, the color of the tunic and of the turban fades and, when worn over a white *dhoti*, they become nothing more than a distinguishable caste dress. However, a man can communicate that he is a “householder in all his glory” by wearing a long, brightly-

²⁵ There are, however, a few. D. Gold (1999a) deals with the relationships between celibate and householder Nāth Jogīs. For Nāth paintings in royal possession in Jodhpur, see Diamond (2000). White (1995, 2001) describes a textual account of the life of Mastnāth, a Nāth renouncer whose *samādhi* is in Asthal Bohar monastery in Rohtak District, Haryana, which is quite close to Rajasthan. White (1996) constantly refers to the “Nāth Siddhas,” celibate alchemists of medieval South Asia.

dyed tunic with a full turban and a *rudrākṣa* bead necklace. Equally important for householders and ascetics is the *śiṅgī nād* (alternatively pronounced *śriṅg nād*, or just *nād*, “horned sound”), the black string worn around the neck, adorned with a rudrākṣa bead, a ring, and a small whistle made out of animal horn. Certain Nāth *sādhus* are known as *kānpḥaṭā* (“split-eared”) because they wear large ear-rings through a hole in the cartilage in the middle of their ears, created by a guru in the last stage of initiation. D. Gold remarks that wearing earrings indicates both the mark of group identity and a life-stage change for celibate Nāth Jogīs, but furthermore identifies one, in a permanent sense, as a Jogī from a very particular sect. Most householders, however, never undergo this altering initiation because “there does not always seem to have been obvious correlations between split ears and religious repute” (D. Gold 1996: 94-95). In the recent past, though, there have been several Rajasthani householder Nāths to have their ears split. D. Gold examines three cases of adult, householder Nāth ear-splitting, those of Rup Nath, Bana Nath, and Mishri Nath, in order to examine similarities and differences in the individual’s motivations implicated in and the personal meaning derived from the focus of “personal commitment” in this specific ritual (D. Gold 1996: 102-107). While such occasional connections and continuities between these householders and ascetics exist, the differences in ritual practice are perhaps more notable.

Householder Nāths of Ajmer District, Rajasthan lead and participate in a funeral cult which emphasizes the performance of *nirguṇ bhajans* and the *pūjā* of a goddess named Hīṅglāj, whose main temple is in Baluchistan (in what is today Pakistan). Nāths stand apart from normative Hindu village tradition in funeral practices in two important ways. The first is that householder Nāths dispose of their dead in the same manner as ascetics: householder Nāths are buried sitting upright in a yogic position, in cremation grounds that are located close to their neighborhoods.

This tradition already ostracizes the Nāths in the eyes of some villagers, who point out the ritual impurity of dead bodies, and the polluting possibilities of keeping such impure substances so close to one's house. The second important distinction between more normative Hindu funeral practices and those of householder Nāths in rural Rajasthan is the secrecy of the *jāgaraṇ* (all night singing of *nirguṇ bhajans*) on the eleventh night after death (Gold and Gold 1984: 119-120; A. Gold 1988: 98-119). In order to participate, one must take initiation under a village householder Nāth. D. Gold (2002: 150) identifies this group as the *dasnāmī* funeral cult (cult of ten names). Initiation into the cult entails the acquisition of the "ten names" from a householder Nāth guru, after which the initiated participates in *jāgaraṇs*. Although the *dasnāmī* funeral cult keeps portions of its ritual practice private, members were generally willing to discuss their practices with both D. Gold and A. Gold. The "ecstatic participation in devotional song-fest," such as participation in the *dasnāmī* funeral cult and the public *nirguṇ bhajan* song-fests, plays an important role in the construction of the "socio-religious identity" of householder Nāths (A. Gold 2002: 145). A number of Nāths established themselves as particularly good singers or as adept in the interpretation of the meaning of the bhajans, components of personal identity that were extremely important to some people.

Furthermore, certain renouncer Nāth Jogīs are renowned in various parts of north India and Nepal as possessors of various miraculous abilities, usually as a result of ascetic and yogic practice. The performance of *haṭha yoga*, as taught by the "perfected master" (*siddha*) Gorakhnāthjī, leads to an accumulation of "supernatural powers (*siddhīs*), such as those that culminate in bodily immortality, *jīvanmuktī*" (White 2001: 140-42). The yogic "techniques and goals" of the medieval Nāth Jogī, "an individualistic and materialistic 'self-made god,'" both "caused him to be branded by his rivals as a haughty and atheist" and made the sect and individual Jogīs "attractive

to both the peasant masses and a certain number of Indian princes and potentates” (*ibid*).

Nāth Jogī householders are sometimes seen as possessing a hereditary claim to those yogic powers (Gold and Gold 1984). This is particularly the case in rural Rajasthan, where most villages have at least one or two Nāth families. In many important Nāth narratives, impressed or devoted Kings and rulers sometimes give land to powerful Nāth Jogīs for monasteries or shrines. The two most striking examples of this relationship between devoted King and powerful Jogī are: a) between Mān Singh, the Mahārājā of the Rajput kingdom of Jodhpur from 1803 until 1841, and a Nāth Jogī named Ayas Dev Nāth; and b) between King Prithvi Nārāyaṇ Śāh (1723- 1775), the Gorkhālī ruler responsible for the conquering and unification of most of Nepal, and his powerful Kānpaṭā advisor, Bhagavantānāth – who is popularly conflated with Gorakhnāth.²⁶ D. Gold notes that while most villages in Rajasthan have one or two resident Nāth families, the villages with larger Nāth populations “have all been the sites either of yogic establishments that are still visibly substantial or of locally well-remembered Yogīs with endowments from *rājās* certified by copper-plates” (1999b: 150-51). The village of Dhamnia, in Bhilvara district, Rajasthan, is one such place. A substantial Nāth shrine contains a certified copper plate stating that, circa 1383 C.E., a Maharana Raimal Singh “gave land for the shrine to one Sarvan Nath,” who had attracted many followers. After settling in Dhamnia, one of Sarvan Nāth’s disciples, Megh Nāth, became sufficiently well known to establish a shrine in a nearby village named Kheriya. There, one of Megh Nāth’s disciples, Shital Nāth, prospered as a result of his “magic powers,” and thus too accumulated wealth, land, and cattle; except that Shital Nāth decided to take a wife, which eventually caused

²⁶ For Mān Singh’s relationships to the Nāth, see D. Gold (1995) and Diamond (2000). For Prithvi Nārāyaṇ Śāh’s relationships with Bhagavantānāth, see Bouillier (1991a, 1991b).

disputes among the local disciples and tribal communities. After his death, his sons argued over the shrines, eventually leading to a curse that Dhamnia's Nāth community will prosper while Kheriya's will not. The effect of this curse is still felt. D. Gold concludes that "Thus, the fall of the Naths of Dhamnia from the powerful yogis they once were to the ordinary householder-peasants most are today came about through an unfortunate interaction of magical power with the worldly passions of family and politics" (1999a: 70-72). Although it may require householder Nāth Jogīs to discuss such a "fall," the specific prestige associated with powerful ascetics of the past is able to work simultaneously with the Nāths' prestige as *gurus* and lead-performers in funeral cults, which has, in some cases, created a specific niche for Nāth Jogī householders in various parts of rural Rajasthan.

The Kalbeliyas present an interesting comparison to householder Nāth Jogīs in rural Rajasthan. Robertson (1998: 12) notes that the Nāth Jogī caste in Rajasthan is comprised of a number of hierarchically arranged sub-castes, one of the lower of which is the Kalbeliya, who Robertson claims "primarily identify themselves as Jogi Nath sanperas. Other people may be jogis (yogis), or Naths, or sanperas (snake charmers), but they are not all three" (1998: 276).²⁷ Indeed, there are several similarities between the Kalbeliyas and the rural Nāths described above. For example, adult Kalbeliyas men who have been initiated by a Nāth *guru* and taught correct *mantras* wear ochre colored tunics and turbans when they perform (Robertson 1998: 60). Kalbeliyas bury their dead, are associated with *siddhīs* or yogic powers, and often officiate rites at Śaiva shrines, particularly those of Bherūjī (Sanskrit: Bhairava) (Robertson 1998: 60-65, 140-42). Their narratives often feature the yogic exploits of famous Nāths, particularly Gorakhnāthjī and their *guru* Kanipāvjī, from whom they

²⁷ Again, this is not true. There are caste-communities of Nāth Jogī Saṃperās throughout northern India who are not identified as Kalbeliyas.

claim descent in much the same way as agriculturalist Nāth Jogī householders claim descent from power Jogīs-turned householders (Robertson 1998: 55, 281-88). One difference here, however, is the method of descent. Instead of narratives highlighting the significance of a powerful Jogī's taking of a "female disciple" in the creation of a Jogī caste, the Kalbeliyas narrative of Kanipāvji features a rivalry between him and Gorakhnāthji (Robertson 1996; 282-88).

The Kalbeliyas present other interesting differences as well. For example, even though they share burial of their dead with other Nāth Jogīs, the events of a Kalbeliya funeral on the eleventh night after a death differ from those of the sedentary agriculturalist Nāth Jogīs of Ajmer District, Rajasthan. While only initiates into the Nāth *dasnāmī* funeral cult are permitted to attend the *jāgaraṇ* and Hiṅglāj Mātā *pūjā*, Robertson (1998: 237), who along with other non-Nāths, such as the Muslim Qalandars (bear trainers and performers), was allowed to attend those rites for deceased Kalbeliyas. Robertson does not describe anything like the *dasnāmī* funeral cult of A. Gold's (1988) or D. Gold's (2002) texts. Furthermore, Robertson (1998: 12-13) claims that, besides the Chabṛivāle (basket makers) and Cakkivāle (grinding-stone makers) Nāth Jogī sub-castes, Kalbeliyas do not interact with or have any significant knowledge of other Nāth Jogī sub-castes. In my fieldwork, I discovered otherwise; Kalbeliyas frequently referred to and interacted with members of the Nāth caste of the Golds' publications. My Kalbeliyas informants, particularly those living in Bhojpurā Kaccī Bastī, mixed quite well and inter-married with these other Nāth Jogīs. Either way, the comparison between Kalbeliyas and other Householder Nāth Jogīs in Rajasthan is fruitful because of the differences it elucidates. A comparison between Kalbeliyas and Nāth Jogī Saṃperās of other areas would be equally appropriate. Unfortunately, Robertson has done neither. In fact, Robertson (1998: 276) incorrectly

claims that there are no other Nāth Jogī snake charmers other than the Rajasthani Kalbeliyas.²⁸ Hence, the comparison will have to wait.

Having thus introduced the arguments of this thesis, the conditions of my fieldwork, and literature reviews regarding both South Asian snake-charmers and Nāths in Rajasthan, let us turn our attentions to this papers use of “memory.”

²⁸ While there are no detailed academic accounts of non-Rajasthani Nāth Jogī Saṃperās, there are several passing references in academic texts and a longer, governmental document detailing some aspects of their social practices. Briggs (1938: 59-60) describes his brief meeting with itinerant Nāth Jogī Saṃperās in 1926. Similarly, White (1996: 350-52) gives an account of his brief encounter with a Nāth Jogī Saṃperā named Bhandarināth in Kathmandu, Nepal in 1993. After the passing of the Wildlife Act of 1972, which criminalized the catching, possessing, and occupational use of wild animals within city boundaries, various police raids into Saṃperā villages resulted in the arrests of Saṃperās throughout north India. Hence, in an effort to negotiate both the preservation of wildlife and the cultural heritage of Saṃperās, the Wildlife Trust of India researched and published a manual addressing the social practices of the Saṃperās, their economic conditions and treatment of snakes, perceived shortcomings in current policy dealing with wildlife, and a proposed plan for the negotiation between the needs of the snakes and snake-charmers (Dutt 2004: 12-14).

CHAPTER 2

ORAL AND BODILY PERFORMANCES OF MEMORY

Introduction

One of the central concerns of this thesis is Kalbeliya memory. Yet, in order to unpack this thesis's use of the term "memory," and hence the importance of an exploration of the memories of a specific social group, a review of a small portion of the recent academic writing on memory is in order. This section is divided into two parts, corresponding to this thesis's two uses of memory. In the first, I will examine a set of literature which deals with memory as a method for conducting research in a more historicized anthropology and a more anthropological history. While part of this section will deal theoretically with memory, its main concern is to delineate the ways in which the thesis will treat the interviews with Kalbeliyas in chapters three and four. Secondly, we will turn to those theories of bodily memory, drawn largely from the work of French ethno-sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, in order to anticipate the arguments of chapter five. While chapters three and four focus on Kalbeliyas' oral representations of their past, chapter five asks how Kalbeliyas represent their pasts through skilled practice in the tourism industry.

In their preface to *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination*, John and Jean Comaroff write that, during the 1980's, post-structuralism and postmodernism had destabilized many of the central terms and practices of anthropology, most specifically the terms "culture" and "ethnography," and ideas of "otherness," upon which cultural anthropology relied (1992: ix-xii). These critiques occurred during a global political, economic, and cultural exchange marked by "the rise of global communications and mass media, the internalization of the division of labor, the revolution in worldwide patterns of consumption, the commoditization of popular culture, and the dissolving

of neat political and ideological boundaries around societies and cultures” (1992: x). The Comaroffs claim that one methodological tool with which anthropologists might brave this new intellectual horizon is with a “historical anthropology” in which “culture” and “ethnography” are central. Such a position affirms that the “human world, post-anything and –everything, remains the product of discernible social and cultural processes: processes partially indeterminate yet, in some measure, systematically determined; ambiguous and polyvalent, yet never utterly incoherent or meaningless; open to multiple constructions and contests, yet never entirely free of order – or the reality of power and constraint” (1992: xi). Descriptions of both the past and present must assume the “ethnographic gaze”: historians must utilize the “tools of the ethnographer” and ethnographies are incomplete unless “informed by the historical imagination” (*ibid*). Dube claims that the interactions and dialogues between anthropologists and historians have been useful in critically reworking both theory and method, such that scholars may either approach the archives with the theories and concerns of an ethnographer, or work in the field with a developed sense of the interplay between history, culture, and power (2007: 1-2, 19-20, 24-25).

Oral Representations of Memory

One theoretical and methodological tool resulting from these dialogues across the disciplinary boundaries of anthropology and history, which enables the scholar to conduct historicized anthropology, is social memory. Taking shape as an academic interest long before the 1980’s, social memory was first explored by Maurice Halbwachs (1877-1945), a French sociologist and student of Durkheim. Diverging from contemporary, psychological conceptions of memory as an inherently individual faculty, Halbwachs theorized “collective memory,” which is a social means for constituting and recalling the past, distinct from and contrasted with “history.”

Rossington and Whitehead (2007: 5-7) claim that two texts which reopened the discussion on memory, both of which engaged seriously with and reintroduced the work of Halbwach were Yosef Yerushalmi's *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (1982) and Pierre Nora's 'Between Memory and History', the introduction to his *Les Lieux de Mémoire* (1984; trans. 1989). The first was precursor to a larger academic trend. In the 1990's, Holocaust studies relied heavily on the memories of survivors, in which narrative, history, true and false memories, trauma, and identity were all centrally debated and theorized. In the second, Rossington claims (2007: 135), Nora elaborates Halbwachs's argument that memory and history are distinct methods of understanding time.

Rossington continues that Nora's essay was, similar to Benedict Anderson's idea of "imagined communities" (1991: 187-206), useful to scholars attempting to explain national identity through recourse to memory. Rossington and Whitehead (2007: 8-9) find that this project of characterizing the production of national identity was another academic legacy which turned to memory in 1990's. More specifically, postcolonial studies, concerned with the "continuing effects of the processes and systems of empires," and hence with "temporality and the past," has occasionally relied on memory methodologically (Rossington and Whitehead 2007: 9). One subset of scholars utilizing memory as method, and associated with postcolonial studies, is the Subaltern Studies collective, which has sought to recover and give pride of place to the voice of the "subaltern" (the dispossessed or marginalized, originally used in reference to South Asia) in history, and to indicate the complicity of politics in writing history. Rossington and Whitehead point specifically to Spivak's article "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography" (1998), in which she is concerned with asking if the subaltern is able to speak for him/herself, or must always be represented by others. Spivak, in turn, offers that the memories of subalterns may, in fact, provide a

means for recovering a portion of subaltern voice not accounted for in the archives. Rossington and Witehead, however, ignore the work of other scholars from this collective, including Shahid Amin And Gyanendra Pandey; the former, at least, examined memory before the publication of Spivak's article.

Amin's *Event, Metaphor, Memory* (2006 [1995]) is about the anti-police riots in Chauri Chaura on February 4, 1922, generally remembered as a violent outburst, antithetical to the disciplined non-violent nationalist struggle led by Gandhi. This memory, however, is the product of nationalist narrative strategies, assembled of "well-known and memorable events," outlining the "triumph of good over evil," and hence constructing a "selective national amnesia in relation to specified events which would fit awkwardly, even seriously inconvenience, the neatly woven pattern" (Amin 2006 [1995]: xix-xx). The riots at Chauri Chaura, however, were conducted by followers of Gandhi, protesting colonial rule in accordance with and under the organization of Gandhi's Congress party. As a result of nationalist strategies to avoid association with violence, Chauri Chaura became a metaphor, representing "violent police-peasant confrontations under the British Raj" to both nationalists and colonialists (Amin 2006 [1995]:220). In order to avoid reproducing this metaphor of Chauri Chaura, and seeking to somehow represent the voices of the peasants involved in the events at Chauri Chara, Amin conducted "historical fieldwork" among those elderly villagers in Gorakhpur district, who were involved, knew those involved, and who remembered the events. Using these interviews in combination with the court speeches of the accused, recorded in the archives, Amin seeks to "arrive at an enmeshed, intertwined and imbricated web of narratives from every available source" (2006 [1995]: 222). In other words, Amin claims that:

The desire to discover in oral history an entirely different source from the archival offers a faint promise. But for me it was not a question of counterposing local remembrance against authorized accounts: the process by which historians gain access to pasts is richly problematic, as is the relationship between memory and record, and the possibilities of arriving at a more nuanced narrative, a thicker description, seem enhanced by putting the problems on display. (2006 [1995]: xxi)

Another Subaltern Studies historian to use memory in constructing a thick, implicated, and enmeshed picture of nationalist strategies of remembering and forgetting is Gyandendra Pandey.

Like Amin, Pandey wants to write a history of an event, the “genocidal violence” of the partition of British India into the modern nation-states of India and Pakistan, “and yet [simultaneously] convey something of the impossibility of the enterprise” (2001: 4-5). For Pandey, communities are bound together by memories and rituals which are “contested and variously interpreted ... yet autonomous and even resistant to its rules in many ways” (2001: 8). Our understandings of history are in many ways the “sites of memory” established by nationalism and the modern state. Thus “private memories” and “individual histories” are shaped and formed in conjunction with “the ‘memory-histories’ of states, parties and pressure groups representing communities and nations” (Pandey 2001: 11). Nationalist strategies, again, were responsible for the removal of violence from the popular representation of Partition. This separation, however, is not present in the accounts of survivors, for whom “Partition *was* violence, a cataclysm, a world (or worlds) torn apart” (Pandey 2001: 6-7). Pandey finds that the difference between historical accounts and memories of Partition is part of the greater trend of difference between memory and history.

Novetzke claims that many scholars after Halbwachs have sought to elucidate the distinctions between memory and history (2008: 26-29). Characterizing such attempts, Novetzke offers that memory was given the theoretical status it enjoyed in the 1980's because of its role in critiquing "modern metatheories," such as those of the nation-state (as seen above), progress, and scientific reason (*ibid*). For example, evidenced by Nora's discussion of the "sites of memory" (*lieux de mémoire*) in France, particularly those pertaining to the nation, Novetzke points out that the dialectic between history and memory is similar in many ways to that between modern and nonmodern. Memory studies also frequently employ the dialectic and differentiations between oral and literate societies, with memory tied to orality and history to literacy. Scholars generally view memory and history as "distinct and mutually exclusive modes of recalling the past" (Novetzke 2008: 38). For example, for Jan Assmann (2006), the two are distinguished by the disinterests of memory to distinguish fact from fiction. For Jacques le Goff (1992), history, and not memory, exists only as professional *scholarship*. Memory can stand next to the archive as historical data, but cannot supplant the rationality of history. Even still, le Goff writes, both memory and history remain forms of social practice. In response to the larger debates about the distinctions between history and memory, Novetzke points to the influence of Hegel's dialect, who sought to pair reason and "Spirit" in the progression of human self-awareness. In those places of the world which had not progressed, Hegel claimed, people had pasts, but only "half-awakened" knowledge of it, "encoded in "'Legends, Ballad-stories, Traditions' all of which 'must be excluded from ... history'" (Hegel 1956 [1837]: 2; quoted in Novetzke 2008: 37). Following Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam (2003), Novetzke diverges from Hegel and claims that history existed in premodern India as "textures" among other "genres of composition," which serve

“different goals of historical recollection” (2008: 39-40). Memory and history, therefore, can be viewed as two distinct “‘textures’ of remembrance.”

As for how these “textures of remembrance” may be used, Novetzke has brought together two bodies of academic literature to write a history of the “public memory” in the Indian state Maharashtra of the saint Namdev. Regarding the first part of the phrase “public memory,” Novetzke uses the idea of “public” to indicate the “tripartite structure” of gods, poets, and audience, and “to the ways *bhakti* relies on the flow of sentiment and information, and the visibility of that flow” (2008: 15). His usage of “public” relies heavily on works which seek to describe the development of “public culture” and the “public sphere” in “modern” India. The public sphere in scholarship on India is generally related to mass media, printing, and the nation, all indicating modernity and the state. Instead of viewing public as inherently “modern,” Novetzke takes Micheal Warner’s description of “public,” from his work on queer publics in the US:

[A] public enables a reflexivity in the circulation of texts among strangers who become, by virtue of their reflexively circulating discourse, a social entity. (Warner 2005: 11-12; cited in Novetzke 2008: 16-17)

Novetzke claims that the circularity of Warner’s definition, which resembles characterizations of religion by Geertz as a “self-reinforced system of symbols,” and by Bourdieu as a “principle of the ‘reflexive sociology’ of the cultural field,” is purposeful, because a “public” is not factual, demonstrable, nor “carefully constructed; rather, a public relies as much on the imagination of each individual as on a collective agreement as to its existence. People must believe they are a part of a public: this gives it both its strength and its ephemeral quality” (Novetzke 2008: 17). Scholars working on “public,” then, agree that these entities must possess some form

of shared memory of the past with which to sustain themselves (Novetzke 2008: 23). For the second part of his use of “public memory,” Novetzke consults Jan Assmann (2006), who claims that memory is “connective” and moral, that it produces publics which in turn conceptualize of themselves as moral communities. Historical accounts of such publics producing memory is identified by both Assmann and Novetzke as “mnemo-history,” or a history of cultural memory, which generally takes form as writing genealogies of culture, constructing memories instead of the presentation of historical fact.

Differing in its specific use of memory, but likewise trying to develop a historical narrative of community in South Asia, Ann Grodzins Gold and Bhoju Ram Gujar’s *In the Time of Trees and Sorrows* is an excellent ethnographic study of the memories of elder villagers in the former kingdom of Sawar, Rajasthan. Gold and Gujar deal primarily with memories focusing on last twenty years of colonial rule in India, drawing out the oppression villagers faced by both the “Great Kings” and the British. Villagers generally contrast the time under colonial and royal rule with their current circumstances, paying most attention to the changes in landscape, morality, and political rights. Although the king and his employees were oppressive, under his rule wildlife flourished and the community was morally good and full of love for one another. This account contrasts with Gold’s and Gujar’s informants’ representations of their current circumstances, in which they are free from the old forms of oppression, have political rights and land deeds, but less love, morality, and wildlife. In their chapter reviewing recent methodological usage and theorization of memory, Gold and Gujar created four categories, into which they placed much of the recent literature on memory:

- 1) Oral history is a natal event, an emergent process having much in common with performance.
- 2) Oral history and narrated memories offer multiple and conflicting versions of the same event; rather than obscuring the nature of the past these present a more robust, multidimensional reality – giving access to polysemy, multiple meanings that may challenge dominant discourse.
- 3) Memory has a “thick autonomy”; its thickness reveals modes of embodiment, sensuousness, places, materiality, the everyday, and vanished landscapes.
- 4) Memory is a “social fact,” belonging to collective mentalities, but (paradoxically) it is individually experienced. (Gold and Gujar 2002: 80)

The point which Gold and Gujar take away from this list and the works cited in its elaboration is that “just those qualities that make memory suspect as a source of history... make it vital” (2001: 90).

Sharing with Gold and Gujar an interest in rethinking the roles of memory and environment in anthropology, Stewart and Strathern have used memory and its connections with history, community, and identity, in order to draw out its relationship with “landscape,” which may be used subsequently to infuse ethnographic data with spatial and “temporal depth and subjectivity” (2003: 3). In this model, “memory” and “place” are both central to identity in the following processes: people remember places, which are “socially meaningful and identifiable” spaces; these memories of places then form “landscapes,” which are mental and emotional perceptions of one’s social environment – “people’s sense of place and community” which grant “both a foreground and a background in which people feel themselves to be living in the world” (Stewart and Strathern 2003: 4). Stewart and Strathern describe this place-based nexus of knowledge and emotion, the “inner landscape of the mind,” as a source of historical identity through which individuals interact with others in their social

environment. Despite being informed through “cultural knowledge by living” in a specific social environment, landscapes are individually created and thus never exactly replicated (200: 3). It is important to remember that landscape is best understood as a “process” because it is shaped by human actions and perceptions, both subject to and a reflection of change and/or continuity. Hence, landscape is a tool with which Stewart and Strathern seek to connect place, community, and subjectivity with one another and their construction by and resistance to historically defined power structures:

[People] travel with their own inner landscapes. They remember particular places through images of how they looked and what it felt like to be there; or they develop such images through photographs, films, or narratives from others. What they are remembering or creating here are landscapes, to which they have a connection; and such landscapes can travel with people, giving them a sense of ‘home’ when they are not ‘at home.’ The person who stays in one place may not see that place as ‘home.’ The person who travels may carry ‘home’ around as a tangible point in fluidity.²⁹ (Stewart and Strathern 2003: 5-6)

However, this chapter encourages a rereading of this theory, with the help of Tonkin (1992).

While Stewart’s and Strathern’s articulation of landscape is useful, particularly in its wedding of identity, place, memory, history, and the individual, I propose replacing their insistence on the location of “landscape” within the brain, with a discussion of “landscape” as a set of meaningful relations between the wedded processes above, witnessed in the performance of oral recitation of memories. Tonkin argues, for example, that “oral representation of pastness” are inextricable from their

²⁹ This is a particularly useful statement with which to think of Kalbeliya itinerancy.

performative context, in which the speaker and an audience are present (1992: 2). This is because:

The representations of pastness that these interconnections involve include the occasion, when teller and listener intersect at a point in time and space, as well as the times recounted. So the temporalities in question include the tellers' own pasts, till that moment of telling, and the adjustments they make to their tales on account of their listener's pasts. (Tonkin 1992: 3)

This is not to state that individuals are not capable of cognition, however, or that humans do not operate mentally. My insistence here is that we focus on the “landscape” in its location among the performative nature of the narration of recollection. It may be true that Kalbeliyas possess mental “landscapes,” which were articulated when they discussed with me the *jañgal* or villages in and through which they used to wander around. Proving or disproving the existence of these mental schemes, however, is neither my intention nor my objective. Instead, I will be concerned to avail the important and meaningful constructions of relation by considering three temporalities of my interviews, as described by Tonkin: the time in the account, the time in between the account and the performance, and the time of the performance.

From this varied collection of writings on memory, then, I am now able to detail my treatment of those memories of Kalbeliya past I recorded in and around Jaipur. For the third and fourth chapters, I will use my interviews, which, following Stewart and Strathern and Tonkin, may be characterized as a construction of “landscapes” – meaningful relations between individuals, places, and temporalities – at the time of performative representation of pastness – indicating the temporalities of the account, the time between the account and the performance, and the performance

– which, when transmitted among others, helps the imagining of something akin to Novetzke’s “public culture.” That is, the interviews will allow me to witness something which binds together the Kalbeliya community in Jaipur because of its creation of a Kalbeliya “public,” an imagination or agreement of a group by way of circulation of social “texts.” Together with identity and community, this understanding of memory highlights its relationship to social environment, specifically the place and time of the memory, and values and judgments associated with them. In understanding my interviews thusly, I will, following Amin and Gold and Gujar, use them in a particularly suspect and questionably manner so as to give a “thick” and enmeshed illustration of a Kalbeliya past.

Skilled Practice as Bodily Memory

Arriving at such a usage of “memory” for chapters three and four of the thesis, then, the task at hand becomes the presentation of chapter five’s conception of memory. While chapters three and four deals with Kalbeliyas’ representations of the past in my interviews, chapter five focuses on Kalbeliyas’ strategies for their economic and social betterment through different representations of a different past in the tourism industry. In dealing with these issues, this second section on memory will examine theories of “bodily memory,” drawing influence overwhelmingly from the writings Bourdieu (1977, 1984). Although he never wrote very much about memory, it is important to quickly review the major strides in Bourdieu’s writing, particularly those highlighted by theorists of bodily memory. Bourdieu argues that group membership is contingent upon the correct bodily performance at the appropriate times and places, or strategic improvisational practices, motivated by the *habitus*, a set of dispositions both produced by and which re-produces the objective structures of the social conditions of the group (1977: 3-9, 72, 78-82). Social members learn these embodied

strategies of improvisation, internalizing their correct social uses in the appropriate spaces through constant repetition, until they become naturalized, that is, until the actor has “practical mastery” (1977: 87-89). The logic of these strategies is “misrecognized” as inseparable from the times and places in which they are enacted. Hence, the arbitrary social order is naturalized by the relationship between objective social structures and internalized structures. The objective structures reproduce the power relations of which they are the product, by securing the misrecognition of the arbitrariness on which they are based (1977: 64). Elsewhere, examining the relationship between socioeconomic class and taste in art in Paris during the late twentieth century, Bourdieu (1984: 1-7) has argued that an individual’s dispositions are developed relative to the social field in which s/he is educated. With social education, the individual’s practices subtly indicate and place the individual into his/her social field. Hence, while hierarchy influences the dispositions and social practices of individuals, the individual in turn reproduces the hierarchy.

The most concentrated effort to develop a theory of bodily memory is Connerton’s *How Societies Remember* (1989). Connerton claims that social memory is to be found in “commemorative ceremonies,” which are commemorative precisely because of their performative character (1989: 4-5). Performance, in turn, is inherently connected to habit and hence to “bodily automatisms.” While a community may remember its identity when it is “represented by and told in a master narrative,” similar to a collective autobiography, commemorative rituals do more than this: “An image of the past, even in the form of a master narrative, is conveyed and sustained by ritual performances” (Connerton 1989: 70). Connerton then states that

[W]hat is remembered in commemorative ceremonies is something in addition to a collectively organized variant of personal and cognitive memory. For if the

ceremonies are to work for their participants, if they are to be persuasive to them, then those participants must not [be] simply cognitively competent to execute the performance; they must be habituated to those performances. This habituation is to be found ... in the bodily substrate of the performance. (Connerton 1989: 71)

Bodies, then, “stylistically re-enact an image of the past” continually, thereby ensuring the relevance of the past, through “incorporating” bodily practices, or those which impart messages with their bodies while engaged in that activity (Connerton 1989: 71-72). Incorporating bodily practices, with varying degrees of formality, fall into three “heuristic distinctions” between “ceremonies of the body,” “proprieties of the body,” and “techniques of the body” (1989: 79-88).

For “techniques of the body,” Connerton gives the example of bodily gestures, specifically head and hand movements during communication. Connerton turns to a manual of conduct by Erasmus written in 1530 for the example of table manners as “proprieties of the body.” Remembered in table manners are the rules for appropriate behavior, which indicate both the “formation” of an individual “whose sensibility is attuned to the more exacting and meticulous promptings of decorum” and the formation of a society which separates “classes of people who are distinguishable by publicly observable standards of refined behaviour” (1989: 83-84). Finally, Connerton argues that the seventeenth century French nobility, for whom blood dictated nobility membership, used “ceremonies of the body,” such as knowing how to bottle and taste fine wines or possessing a the “knowledge of the hunt” (*ibid*). Included here are also bodily adornments, such as “the use of carriages, the bearing of arms, the wearing of costumes” to perform their noble blood. Adapting Bourdieu’s ideas of symbolic capital, identifiable only through recourse to the history of the group (1977: 171-183), Connerton writes that

the objects endowed with the greatest symbolic power are those which display the quality inherent in the possessor by clearly demonstrating the quality required in the appropriation. Objects of symbolic, as distinct from financial, capital are as it were locked into the whole life history, and therefore the memories, of those who possess them. (Connerton 1989: 87)

These required time to be both learned and treated ceremonially, but eventually reminded performers of French nobility of a system of honor and hereditary transmission as the organizing principle of social stratification.

Bourdieu's *habitus* within the theorization of memory is part of the impetus in Gavid Flood's *The Ascetic Self* (2004). A historian of religions, Flood develops a theory of asceticism, which he then uses in a comparative effort to describe asceticism in Christian, Buddhist, Brahman, and Tantric contexts, and finally reflects on the project in his last two, theoretical chapters. Flood's central thesis is that asceticism, defined as attempts to reverse the flows of body and time, is a performance. Asceticism is the performance of both the "memory of tradition" and the "ambiguity of the self." By "tradition," Flood refers to a "religious tradition, within a shared memory that both looks back to an origin and looks forward to a future goal" (2004: 2). Those who perform such traditions are "historical, language-bearing, gendered" people. The "ambiguity of the self" lies in the fact that this individual person seeks the renunciation of subjectivity. Flood's elaborations of "memory of tradition" finds memory as "information deemed important by a community and often with the function of legitimising the power of a particular group" (2004: 8). Memory assumes the roles of "the transmission of information and knowledge," the constitution of "collective identity," the "maintenance of power relations," and the "individual formation of a life" (*ibid*). While this thesis will remain perhaps more wary than Flood

of the use of “tradition” as an analytical category, the author confirms Flood’s insistence on memory as performance, and the simultaneous production of the individual and the group through bodily practice.

While Flood used Boudieu’s model in a new context, he has done little to add to the overall model of bodily memory. Conversely, Sutton’s discussion of cooking as “skilled practice” not only uses the model in a new context, it is a much needed corrective in its adaptation of the language of “skilled practice” (2006). Sutton’s intention is thinking about how he might discuss food preparation as “skilled practice,” related both to the senses and to memory. His understanding of “skill practice” rests most firmly on the writings of Bourdieu (1982), Connerton (1989), and Ingold (2002). Sutton advises that Bourdieu’s and Connerton’s characterizations of taste as “embodied knowledge or incorporated skill” should open up a “new series of questions about *how* such skill is transmitted, deployed in daily practice and in our relationship to material objects in our environment.” In doing so, Sutton turns to Ingold (2002) and other proponents of “activity theory.”

Sutton summarizes Ingold’s description of skilled practice as the use and adaptation of the mind/body and its extensions (tools, etc.) in a changing environment which is itself “part of the total field of activity” (2006: 91-92). Despite the fact that “mental plans may provide guideposts for practices,” (i.e. assessment of, reflection on work), skilled practice is not accomplishable “through the execution of a mental plan.” Skill is not a set of rules, and cannot thusly be transmitted; skill is always learned through experience or apprenticeship. Ingold uses the term “education of attention,” where anthropologists might use “enculturation,” to describe the processes by which we learn skill (Sutton 2006: 92). Here, Ingold adds that this is also an education of memory: “a training of the total person into practices that make certain things and events in the environment memorable.”

Neither Bourdieu nor Sherry Ortner has dealt systematically with the problem of memory. However, because Bourdieu's work is so central to the concerns of theorists of bodily memory, any real corrective to the Bourdieu-Connerton system of social education, bodily memories, and social reproduction, must deal with the root source. Ortner claims that Bourdieu's practice theory, responding to a theoretical environment in which models found only constraints on behavior, sought to "conceptualize the *articulations* between the practices of social actors 'on the ground' and the big 'structures' and 'systems' that both constrain those practices and yet are ultimately susceptible to being transformed by them" (Ortner 2006: 1-2). This important corrective to social theory claimed that "history makes people, but people make history," which, despite posing a seeming contraction, may actually be "the profoundest truth of social life" because it "restored the actor to the social process without losing sight of the larger structures that constrain (but also enable) social action" (Ortner 2006: 2-3). However helpful she has found practice theory, Ortner has sought to correct its shortcomings with recourse to three bodies of theoretical literature, all of which appeared contemporaneously with practice theory in the late 1970s and early 1980s: "the power shift"; "the historic turn"; and the "reinterpretation(s) of culture" (Ortner 2006: 1-4).

For an emphasis on power, Ortner turns to Foucault, Scott, and Williams, whose work she characterizes as "offer[ing] the most general tools for examining any form of domination and inequality" (2006: 6).³⁰ Despite having used the works of all of these writers at one point or another, Ortner finds William's (1977) "Gramsci-derived notion of hegemonies as strongly controlling but never complete or total to be the most useful in [her] various attempts to inject more power into a practice approach" (Ortner 2006: 6-7). Ortner underscores that, because domination is always

³⁰ For more on the effects of the "power shift" on Ortner's practice theory, see Ortner (1996).

characterized by “ambiguities, contradictions, and lacunae,” social reproduction too is “never total, always imperfect, and vulnerable to the pressures and instabilities inherent in any situation of unequal power” (2006: 7).

“The historic turn” can be seen in three distinct movements: Marxist histories of political economy, such as Eric Wolf’s *Europe and the People without History*; cultural histories, such as Geertz’s *Negara*; and colonial histories, such as Bernard Cohn’s “History and Anthropology: The State of Play.”³¹ The importance of this new interest in history lay both in its expansion of the ethnographic method, and in its theoretical assertion that “culturally organized practices” are generated through local and global historical processes (Ortner 2006: 9). For Ortner, it is important to remember that “history” is neither always set in the past, nor always change; it also involves a “duration” of patterns, and a “situating” of studies in their historical “moments.”

The “reinterpretation(s) of culture takes strength from the recent critiques of the essentialist term “culture” as used in classical anthropology. Ortner affirms trends in studies of “public culture,” and “ethnography and media studies,” which assume culture is related to politics, either as its subject or part of its process, and moves “across social, cultural, and political boundaries” (Ortner 2006: 13). In Ortner’s view, cultures are collections of “public texts, to be analyzed for the kinds of ideological work they did” (2006: 13). Additionally, Ortner underscores the “new-old concept of culture,” which constrains individuals to act in accordance with their desires, by asserting that “culture shapes the subjectivities of people not so much as members of particular groups (although that is not totally irrelevant) but under specific historic regimes of power” (2006:14). Furthermore, she uses the enabling capabilities of

³¹ Ortner (1999) has previously indicated the effects of history and historicization on her theory of practice.

culture to characterize as always culturally available both resistance and agency – empowerment in “a world of domination and inequality” (Ortner: 2006: 15). The main reason, Ortner claims, that practice theory, after its infusion with power and history, needs “culture” is that social transformation is actually a cultural transformation:

Taking culture in the new-old sense, as the (politically inflected) schema through which people see and act upon the world and the (politically inflected) subjectivities through which people feel – emotionally, viscerally, sometimes violently – about themselves and the world, social transformation involves the rupturing of those schemas and subjectivities. And taking culture in the newer – public, mobile, traveling – sense, social transformation works in part through the constant production, contestation, and transformation of public culture, of media and other representations of all kinds, embodying and seeking to shape old and new thoughts, feelings, and ideologies. (Ortner 2006: 18)

Reflecting on the literature reviewed in section, the theoretical lens for the fifth chapter of the thesis begins to come together. Skilled practice of Kalbeliyas (those deployed in showing snakes to foreigners: playing the *bīn*, catching and handling snakes, wearing the clothes of *sādhus*, etc.) can now be understood as bodily memory, constructed through imposed and resisted power structures (with police and wildlife protection activists in front of city palace, with tourists, with each other, etc.), subjected to historical change and given meaning in a specific historical time period (one in which “traditional” performances and goods are valued by wealthy tourists), and as indicating something of a politically and historically constructed cultural environment, in which subjectivities are shaped by “historic regimes of power,” resistance to which is culturally viable. Finally, this model accounts for social/cultural transformation, by indicating the constant process whereby the individual produces public culture while public culture simultaneously produces the individual.

Bridging Memories: Preoccupations with History

In relating the oral memories of chapters three and four to the bodily memories of chapter five, I turn to reflections on the uses of history and dialogue in recent scholarship.³² By doing so, I propose that both forms of memory – oral and bodily – are forms of representation of the past, used in the present to effect the future. Walter Benjamin’s “Thesis on the Philosophy of History” (1968) is particularly useful in imagining the social utility of relating temporalities. For example, in paragraph VI, Benjamin indicates the potency of representations of the past: “To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it ‘the way it was’ (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashed up at a moment of danger,” which “affects both the content of the tradition and its receivers” (1968: 257). Furthermore, Benjamin’s “angel of history” faces the past, but is propelled towards the future (1968: 259-60, paragraph IX). While Benjamin’s work has many implications for historians, I use this reference to point out that the nonlinear past is eminently implicated in the future by forces external to it (here: Kalbeliya speakers and actors).

³² The question of history and temporality in anthropology has a long history. For two important moments in this genealogy, see Lévi-Strauss (1966) and Fabian (1983). In *The Savage Mind* (1966), Lévi-Strauss depicts an ever present opposition between history and structure because the latter will always contain “original and derivative series” (1966: 233-34). Part of his preoccupation with history and structure in “so-called primitive” societies is to show that they are not less intelligent or sophisticated than their European counterparts. Secondly, Fabian’s critique of anthropology (1983) asks how its practitioners distance from their own societies their objects of study. By avoiding “the question of coevalness and temporal coexistence” of the fieldworker and observed native, Lévi-Straussian structuralism, “eliminate[s] Time as a significant dimension of either cultural integration or ethnography” (1983: 52). Particularly powerful in Fabian’s critique of Lévi-Strauss’s use of history is his attestation of the insulation of structuralism to the productive and structuring capabilities of historical flows.

Keane's examination of the colonial and postcolonial encounters between Dutch Calvinist missionaries and Sumbanese Indonesians draws readers' attentions to the importance of competing narratives of history in the continuous and processual production and transformation of discourse and practice (2007). Central to Kean's argument is what he calls "sense of history," which is a perception of change and/or continuity with the past, present, and future (2007: 114). This sense of history is a product of the paradigmatic linking of discourse, practice, and material objects – what Keane calls "semiotic ideology" (see 2007: 16-19). Responses to this sense of history, or the ways in which it influences individuals, are also relative to the situational "semiotic ideology." Fleshing out his characterizations of the uses of the past, Keane shows that, in the encounter between Dutch missionaries, Sumbanese converts, and Sumbanese ancestor ritualists, the "moral narrative of modernity" was central to indictments, arguments, and self-representation (2007: see particularly Chs. 5-7). However, the Sumbanese discourses and practices that were represented as "modern" drew from "semiotic ideologies" that were already available. Interestingly, Keane points to the ways in which Sumbanese converts placed themselves in these moral narratives of modernity – tied to a sense of history which began in the garden of Eden and continued through Biblical Judea, Europe, and Indonesia – while simultaneously remaining heirs to the authority of the ritualist ancestors (2006: Ch. 5).

Keane's work draws heavily from Chakrabarty's assertion in *Provincializing Europe* (2000) that certain Bengali practices and forms of being find precedence (and contradiction) in both European Enlightenment thought *and* fundamentally different, local, and paradigmatic realities. That is, Chakrabarty disrupts linear, universal history (History 1) that finds "modernity" emanating from Europe, and non-Europe always lagging behind. Chakrabarty explicates "conjoined and disjunctive genealogies" of discourse and practice, which simultaneously indicate European and Bengali

influence (2000: see Part Two). These discourses and practices (History 2s) cannot exist in accounts of History 1, because they present instances of a *different* Bengali modernity. Keane uses Chakrabarty's work to argue that all uses of history, including "the most earnest claims to be setting out on new adventures, even to be entering into a universal history – whether modernity or salvation" always draw from existing forms of discourse and practice (2007: 174-45).

As a particular relation between different historical genealogies, and hence an instance of Chakrabarty's History 2,³³ Kalbeliya oral performances of memories and their deployment of bodily re-memorialization draw from repertoires with conjoined genealogies – or, from what I will call "conjoined repertoires." These performances create a "sense of history" in the body and in discourse that seems to signal discontinuity with the past, yet are constructed through preexisting modes of being and acting. Hence, these instances are comparable to Keane's examples of religious conversion in Indonesia (2007: 149-269) and to Part Two of Chakrabarty's book (2000: 117-236), and help to disrupt universal, History 1, as well as other "moral narratives of modernity."

³³ Perhaps I could claim, following Loos (2006: 19-20), that the Kalbeliya example is one of an "alternative modernity." However, following Keane (2007), I maintain that "modernity" is always used in narratives informed by "semiotic ideologies." Hence, the first place to look for a discussion of modernity ought to be one's informants (or, for Historians, the archives). As my informants never brought up issues of "modernity," any discussion in this paper of "modernity" will ultimately be forced.

CHAPTER 3

“YOU WON’T HAVE A HOUSE IN THE VILLAGE”:

ITINERANCY IN THE *JAṄGAL*

Introduction

Individual descriptions of or references to a collective Kalbeliya past usually make use of a definite repertoire of important objects and activities, which frequently serve as symbols and metonyms for both the collective Kalbeliya past in their narratives, and for the Kalbeliya community in greater north Indian society. Such objects and activities include: a) social practices, such as itinerancy, begging, the raising and care of donkeys, dogs, chickens, and other such animals; and the hunting of rabbits, porcupines, and partridges, with the help of dogs; b) forms of begging, such as showing snakes, dressing as ascetics, showing stone images of the Seven Sisters (a group of mother goddesses important in Rajasthan), and showing five-, six-, and seven-legged cows; c) musical instruments, such as *bīṁs* (gourd flute), *ḍaphlīs* (small hand drum covered with lizard skin), and *tumbās* (a percussive string instrument, made from a gourd); and d) places, such as *jaṅgals* (forest), villages, and tents. In the next two chapters of the thesis, I present excerpts from my interviews with Kalbeliyas in and around Jaipur, who draw from this repertoire in describing their past and present, and reflect on and analyze their memories and current situations. This chapter focuses on itinerancy, while the following chapter approaches remembered services provided by Kalbeliyas during a period of itinerancy: ascetic-begging, snake-showing, and entertaining. The reader will find that the focus of each chapter appears in the content of the other. Hence, it will prove important to keep in mind that the repertoire mentioned above is drawn from frequently. Furthermore, although these forms of begging and entertaining have been practiced separately and are distinct from one

another and from itinerancy in important ways, they are, however, deeply related to and overlap one another, and are remembered to have been frequently practiced together and by the same people.

Hayden (1999) has recently produced an ethnographic description of the caste councils of a nomadic community known as Nandiwallas in the west-central Indian state of Maharashtra. The Nandiwallas are an example of what Hayden calls “service nomads”: they travel between villages, towns, and cities, receiving money for entertainment through the performance of bull tricks. Not many studies of Indian service nomads exist; but from the work that has been published, Hayden finds six general characteristics of service nomads (1999: 11-12): (1) Service nomads do not produce what is necessary to survive; they trade services for goods with settled people, from whom they also occasionally steal. Hence, they frequent fertile areas, in which surplus production is greater. (2) Service nomads are “highly specialized in the primary services they supply,” although they do have secondary occupations. Service nomadic women “may contribute significantly to household economy by carrying on trade in small items (e.g. folk medicines, needles, threads), or through services offered (e.g. abortions for village women [Nandiwallas] or prostitution for village men).” (3) Service nomads divide territories amongst themselves in order to avoid competition, “as any given area offers only a limited demand for a specific service.” (4) Service nomads seek to enjoy friendly relations with settled communities, thereby attempting to protect their ability to return. “However, hostility from the settled population is still frequently encountered” (5). “Service nomads often have a ‘home village’ where they return during certain seasons, particularly during the rainy season.” (6) Many service nomads have their own language, distinct from the languages spoken in the areas where they travel.

As we shall see in the following chapter, when examined together, my interviews indicate a diversity of services remembered by Kalbeliyas to have been offered during periods of itinerancy. Indeed, far from exhausted by “snake-charming,” these services would have included: entertainment by music, dance, and the handling and display of several species of wild animals; ritual specialization offered by (Kalbeliyas as) *saṃperās*, ascetic beggars, and by the liberation of snakes on ritual holidays associated with such acts; herbal-medical specialization, particularly in attempts to cure injuries caused by poisonous animals; capture and removal of poisonous animals from households, fields, and other areas frequently traversed by humans, susceptible to injury and death. All of these specialties formed important aspects of the social identities of the Kalbeliyas, and the goods received for these actions (whether begged or not) provided the economic basis for their itinerancy. Hence, Kalbeliyas generally fit Hayden’s (1999) description of a community of “service nomads.” A few differences will be discussed in the next chapter.

Drawing from my interviews, I present the reader with the opportunity to observe various and competing Kalbeliya representations of the past. Working with these performative, oral narrations of memory, my first hope is to use the interviews presented in this section for the construction of a “thick,” multidimensional description of the places and practices of Kalbeliya pasts, drawn from multiple and competing accounts. It is central to this thesis that, far from the disinterested transfer of information, this form of representation can be strategically employed in socially constructed ways, both arguing for, and in some cases enacting, certain conceptual relationships between the past, the present, and the future. In other words, the repertoire of themes of remembered Kalbeliya social practice is used in the presentation of multiple and competing arguments. Perhaps in the process of such argumentation, Kalbeliyas are drawing from and generating the “public culture” to

which Novetzke (2008: 15-23) refers – a imagining of the group through the circulation of the “texts” of memory. Let us now turn to Kalbeliya memories of itinerancy.

Memories of Itinerancy

The first interview presented was taken with one of my closest informants, Pūraṇnāth Ḍaglā. Nearly fifty years old during the period of my research, Pūraṇnāth worked as the manager and organizer of a Kalbeliya Dance Party, which enjoyed its relative success due to the skill of his wife and the group’s main dancer, Rājī Ḍaglā.

Pūraṇnāth Ḍaglā: Thirty or forty years ago people – who are now my age – never received much education. In our community, they only had thoughts of living in the jaṅgal, of begging, of eating what they hunted, of begging for alms for a living – that was it ... Forty-fifty years ago they put everything on donkeys and went somewhere else. That was our difficulty. When a whirlwind, storm, or whatever type of weather came – rain or winter – they put all of that stuff under a canopy or inside a tent and wasted their life away. They only begged for alms to support themselves; either that or they displayed their art on the bīn, but they didn’t understand anything about that. They supported their children through those means. But they never said, “Brother, I am going to educate my children.” That thought was not in their minds. So how could the community advance? ... How did our ancestors spend their lives before? They too lived well. I correctly accept that they lived good lives. Somehow they did well and took care of their own with their snakes and bīns.

This interview is presented first for two reasons. Firstly, I would like to use this interview to indicate, from the outset, the “three temporalities” involved in the construction of “landscape” – a set of meaningful relations between individuals, places, and temporalities – in an oral representation of pastness, as characterized by my pairing of Stewart and Strathern (2003) with Tonkin (1992). Secondly, from these temporalities, I will elucidate the relevance and interested, micro-political use of the past in the present as an authoritative repertoire drawn from in the presentation of an argument. The first temporality in this interview, the remembered time, is a generalized representation of Pūraṇnāth’s family and community when he was an adolescent and a young man. The second temporality is the span of time between these remembered generalizations and the performance of this interview. While I am clearly not aware of all of the important occurrences in Pūraṇnāth’s life during this thirty to forty year period, what I do know of his life (as heard from him, his family, his friends, and even from Kalbeliyas and non-Kalbeliyas who do not fit into any of these categories) influences me to read this interview in a specific manner. A brief presentation of some of what I know about Pūraṇnāth’s life will allow me to explicate exactly how I read this interview.

Pūraṇnāth was the second youngest of five brothers and grew up in the village of Ladānā,³⁴ a few kilometers beyond the larger and well known village of Phāgī, fifteen or so kilometers outside of Jaipur. Although they had been given a piece of land by the government, Pūraṇnāth’s parents earned their income by begging and entertaining, traveling from village to village and living in their tent. As a child,

³⁴ As is explained below, Pūraṇnāth’s family was largely semi-itinerant during his childhood. Most of my informants above the age of twenty five or thirty remember a time when they lived in a village while their parents wandered around the cities and villages of Rajasthan, returning occasionally with food and clothing.

Pūraṇṇāth was distinct from the older Kalbeliya children because of his desire for education. His oldest brother Sarvaṇṇāth learned and worked in agriculture, his second oldest brother Antarnāth, his (older) twin brother Rāmjināth, and his younger brother Jagdīśnāth, all learned the work of their father. Pūraṇṇāth, however, insisted on going to the village school. He was so adamant about attending school that he rode a bicycle four or five kilometers each way to the nearest school. Later down the road, Pūraṇṇāth became the only financially successful brother. With the exception of Sarvaṇṇāth, the agriculturalist, the other brothers, two of whom are well-known for their abuses of alcohol, and one of whom was known as an opium addict, are literally not able to support their families.

Both Rāmjināth and Pūraṇṇāth told me several times that, because Rāmjināth was born five minutes before Pūraṇṇāth, he engages with Pūraṇṇāth as would an older brother. However, while the presentation of ideal status, and responsibility in power hierarchies of age may be a culturally important oral performance for these brothers, and may in fact constitute an important practice in other contexts (such as Pūraṇṇāth's relationship with his oldest brother, Sarvaṇṇāth), I do not take this presentation as fact: Rāmjināth's and Pūraṇṇāth relationship is more interesting than this. For example, Pūraṇṇāth's wife, Rājki, covers her head and face with her shawl in front of Rāmjināth, typical behavior of the wife of a younger brother in the presence of her husband's older brother – a fact which might lead the observer to conclude that the nature of the brothers' relationship conforms to their presentation of it. However, Pūraṇṇāth is a successful director of his own dance party, well traveled and wealthier than most other Kalbeliyas. Rāmjināth, on the other hand, is known for his excessive drinking – which he tries to support through his weekly officiations of Bherūjī *pūjā* (see Illustration 5) – and his (subsequent, according to many Kalbeliyas) inability to work and therefore support his wife and children. Equally well known to and criticized



Illustration 5. Rāmjināth Ḍaglā, with his sons, performing Bherūjī *pūjā* in front of his home.

Photo by Yasmine Singh.

by most Kalbeliyas in and around Jaipur are: his habit of sending of his wife to work construction while he drinks away her earnings; his propensity towards fighting; and his overall bodily and sartorial dereliction. Within this relationship, Pūraṇnāth possesses more status and prestige than does Rāmjināth, both in Bhojpūrā Bastī, their neighborhood, and among the Kalbeliya community at large – in Kalākār Colony, and in the villages around Jaipur. Both Rāmjināth and other members of his family explain Rāmjināth's excessive drinking and dereliction through the genesis of these behaviors in the unexpected and tragic death of both his first wife and his older brother, Antarnāth: within a matter of months, his wife collapsed dead in front of their hut and children, and his brother was killed by a train on the tracks directly behind Bhojpūrā Bastī.

For a long period after these tragedies, Pūraṇnāth financially supported Rāmjināth and his children. Rājki cooked food for them and helped with the children, and Pūraṇnāth eventually arranged Rāmjināth's second marriage. However, the brothers now have a strained personal relationship. After continued disputes over money and Rāmjināth's behavior, Pūraṇnāth kicked Rāmjināth and his family out of his house. Frustrated and angry, Pūraṇnāth blames what he sees as the failures of his brothers on both their personal misuses of alcohol, and on the Kalbeliya community's lack of education; these are two of the biggest obstacles, in his estimation, to the progress he envisions for his family and his community. Hence, in Pūraṇnāth's estimation, his uneducated ancestors "wasted their life away" in tents, with thoughts only of the *jaṅgal*. Their earnings by begging and playing the *bīn* (at which they were not very skilled, he would add) were enough to feed their children, for which Pūraṇnāth characterizes them as having done well. However, I must add that Pūraṇnāth, while an opinionated man, is also quite cautious to embed his potentially subversive opinions in what might be thought of as "lip service." Hence, after indicting his ancestors for ignorance and withholding education, and thus advancement, from their children, Pūraṇnāth covers his tracks, so to speak, by adding that these Kalbeliyas also "lived well."

Finally, the last temporality – Pūraṇnāth's performance of representing pastness with me as his audience – is the most difficult for me to characterize, because it necessitates a thorough examination of our relationship. I once wrote in my field journal that my relationship with Pūraṇnāth could be best described as simultaneously comprised of friendship and mutual use. We both had clear intentions in our relationship: Pūraṇnāth thought that I, an American learning Hindi, might find and book gigs for his Dance Party in the US and Europe, negotiating the difficult terrain of information hunts, phone conversations, and contractual agreements – all of which

require a command of English Pūraṇnāth did not have. While the various Kalbeliya dance parties of Jaipur all aspire to travel and perform abroad, to do so they must work with middle-men, who they feel deceive them and take unfair portions of the profit. Pūraṇnāth thought that his ticket beyond these crooked middle-men and into the cultural fairs of Europe and the US lie within our friendship. On the other side of things, I was a graduate student hoping to gather enough information about the Kalbeliyas of Jaipur to write a Masters Thesis. Although improving, my Hindi required the listener to have patience and sympathy. While I am deeply interested in the Kalbeliya community and the Nāth Sampradāy, and did develop some genuine friendships with certain Kalbeliyas, another aspect of my large field of intention must be mentioned. Because both a Masters Thesis and a fluent grasp of Hindi will only aid my pursuit of an academic degree, and may ostensibly play a role in the acquisition of a job, and hence of economic and social capital, Pūraṇnāth, who was quite helpful by way of facilitating for me introductions to other Kalbeliyas and invitations to well-attended social gathers, aided me in ways that may eventually add to my ability to secure money and prestige.

What about Pūraṇnāth's relationship to the listener (the author) during the time of the performance of this interview can help me to read this interview? Central here, I might conjecture, are Pūraṇnāth's awareness of my interest in the old lifestyle and its accoutrements, and my perception of his interest in helping me with my interests and in receiving my help with his. Although this last sentence is (intentionally) awkward, it goes a certain distance to indicate the complicated "mutual use" of our relationship, to which I previously referred. This relationship is quite important and, I think, not only defines the context of this interview, but creates its possibility. Otherwise, Pūraṇnāth might have no opportunity to reflect on his generalized remembrance of the past in such a way. For example, while I have been

concerned to draw the reader's attention to the context of this interview, in order to provide a possible means for our better understanding of it, it is also important to recognize the exchange of information. An important aspect of this interview is Pūraṇnāth's conveyance to me that Kalbeliyas used to live in tents in all types of weather, hunt and beg for sources of sustenance, and wander around with donkeys. In this context then, which is perhaps the exception to a more normative form of conversation, Pūraṇnāth's words mix the exchange of information with the strategic use of language, in order to represent the past in interested ways.³⁵

Hence, the repertoire of authoritative themes drawn from in proposing the argument of Pūraṇnāth's text is as follows: itinerant, begging Kalbeliyas failed themselves, their children, and their community, in their non-participation in education. This depiction is used to argue for the advancement of the Kalbeliya caste-community in local and global markets through education, settled living, and the acquisition of the English language. Additionally, I propose (and frequently intuited in my conversations with Pūraṇnāth), this characterization of the Kalbeliyas social world was meant to affect my contribution of aid to Pūraṇnāth and his Dance Party.

Having thus defined context of this interview and given (a kind of) evidence for the importance of Tonkin's three temporalities, we will now turn to other interviews regarding the remembered Kalbeliya practice of itinerancy. In what follows, I will be less interested than in Pūraṇnāth's interview to contextualize the interviews within my

³⁵ I do not present these events here to create a bibliography of Pūraṇnāth; I do not want his words to seem over-determined, or to portray his entire life as if it leads up to this interview. Furthermore, it is not my intention to analyze Pūraṇnāth psychologically. Rather, I seek only to take Tonkin's claim of the three temporalities of an interview seriously, and to explore, in one instance, what this may entail (1992). These events are given only to indicate a possible frame of reference for the interviewee, and draw on my broader experiences spending time with Pūraṇnāth. For example, during the course of almost every discussion I ever had with Pūraṇnāth, he lamented the problems caused in the Kalbeliya caste-community by alcohol and lack of education.

knowledge of the life circumstances of the interviewees. Instead, while reminding myself how contingent on context they are, I will use these performed oral representations of past-ness (interviews) to arrive at a robust illustration of Kalbeliya itinerancy.

Pūraṇnāth's deployment of strategic representation of the past, which illustrated very little of the "thick" past which memory-as-data promises to generate, may be contrasted with the following interview with Jagdīśnāth Paṃvār, useful as an elaborated representation of the past, yet less argumentative than Pūraṇnāth's text. Kālūnāth Aṭhvāl, Yasmine Singh, and I conducted this interview with Jagdīśnāth and Śaṅkarnāth Derāṇ in Kālvār village,³⁶ twenty kilometers from Jaipur, the morning after a funeral feast, for which I had gone.

Jagdīśnāth Paṃvār: They used to wander around before, and because we wandered around, we kept donkeys, dogs and chickens. It was their hobby. Every one in our caste greatly lamented the sickness of even one animal. If even one animal – a donkey or a dog – fell ill, then everyone who lived together in the entire neighborhood would put as much money as possible into saving the animal. They just sat there watching the sick animal, along with the people who lived near them. They watched the sadness and affliction of the animal. They didn't leave for work, all of them just stayed there seated. Then, after the animal was feeling better the people would collect alms. Half of them went out begging in the neighborhoods and in the villages; the other half went out hunting.

Alright, now [I will tell you] about hunting. We are forester people. So we used to live in the *jaṅgal* before and there were many springs. One or two men used to sit outside of the springs with the hunting dogs. Two or four men

³⁶ A text of both men speaking appears below.

would take the useless dogs who couldn't run as much, and go close to the spring. Then they waited outside for the opportunity when a rabbit or any other animal would come near it. Then when the animal went back into the *jaṅgal*, they would release the dogs behind it on the path.

Kālūnāth Aṭhvāl: They had the dogs follow it.

JP: They had them follow the animal. Then that dog would catch it. And sometimes it got away too. Then they brought that animal home, and then they put the animal in fire [to burn off all of its hair]. After cleaning it that way, some people went back out hunting and some people stayed to divide the meat among everyone. The meat belonged to whoever went hunting and to whoever did not go hunting. They had to give a portion of it to everyone.

KA: They also brought home grains they had received begging.

JP: Whoever went out begging for grain, whoever the half of them were who went begging in the neighborhoods, whoever brought anything home, they had to divide what they brought and give portions to everyone.

KA: They divided it among all the families.

JP: Everyone had portions. If they brought a lot home, then they would give more. If they brought home less, then they gave less. The size of the portions corresponded to the family. But you had to give.

In this interview, Jagdīśnāth first details the practice of keeping animals and the emotional attachments Kalbeliyas had to the animals. Then he moves on to discuss methods of hunting and the distribution of food among the families traveling together. Animals seem to have been an important aspect of the itinerant lifestyle. Jagdīśnāth, who has never been married, lives in Bobas village (fifty kilometers from Jaipur; also the village of Kālūnāth Aṭhvāl and many of my other friends) with his mother. He generally begs with snakes in the village, but not from tourists. When he does not have a snake, he dresses up and begs as a *sādhū*. Throughout the interview from which this excerpt was drawn, Jagdīśnāth was emphatic about two topics. Firstly, he repeatedly delineated the reforms of the previous wrong practices (*galat kām*) of the Kalbeliyas by the *sarpañc sāhib*, Kānnāth Derāṇ (incidentally the father of Śaṅkarnāth, the other man from the interview): he instituted reforms of funeral rites. Whereas Kalbeliyas remember burying their deceased anywhere along their itinerant paths, Kānnāth and the *pañcāyat* have proposed all Kalbeliyas, under the pain of fines, should bury their deceased in a known graveyard within twelve days after the death. Additionally, Kalbeliyas remember a time when everyone brought their own eating bowl and utensils to social gatherings, such as weddings, funerals, *pañcāyats*, etc. Again, Kānnāth and the *pañcāyat* have mandated that the hosts of social gathers shall provide everyone with disposable plates and bowls, made either from banana leaves or paper. Secondly, Jagdīśnāth was incredibly energetic about dogs and tried, several times, to redirect the conversation back to the topic of dogs. While most Kalbeliyas with whom I discussed the past now and then referred to dogs, donkeys, and other animals, Jagdīśnāth spoke about dogs with passion. When Jagdīśnāth, towards the end of the above text, switches from practices involving animals to a discussion of distribution practices within a caravan, it is only because Kālūnāth is drawing the conversation back to topics which he thinks interest me. My major impetus in presenting

Jagdīśnāth's text here is to underscore his portrayal of the moment in which everyone grieved together over the sickness of the animal. Here we have an image of an emotionally connected collective, sharing concerns and interests.

The next text presented is also taken from this interview, although here we now hear the past represented by Śaṅkarnāth Derāṇ, the son of the *sarpañc sāhib*, Kānnāth Derān. Śaṅkarnāth and his family live in the village of Savājaysīhpurā, around forty kilometers outside of Jaipur; he does not, nor has he ever, begged.

Śaṅkarnāth Derāṇ: Our Gurujī was given a curse, an agreement. So their thought was that we are going to live in the *jaṅgal*. There are still those castes today, like the Ādivāsīs (tribal communities), etc., who keep only the possessions they have taken out of the *jaṅgal*. We will no longer keep only those possessions we have taken from there. We used to make these chords from cloth and then use them to make saddle bags. We kept all of our belongings in those saddle bags and would pack everything in them and put them on top of animals when we traveled. The weight did not matter; we put all of our belongings in them. Then we stopped wherever there was land enough.

Jagdīśnāth Paṃvār: Then we would take our belongings out of those saddle bags. Our stuff was always packed on top of the donkeys. We would unpack them wherever we spotted a nice place. We would set up our living quarters as I told you before: we set up three poles on one side, three poles on the other side. Then we attached the mats to them. We bound all of our belongings together and then stay there for four days. After that we would travel ahead.

ŚD: But when we would leave from there we would go to the villages and cities and beg for a living (*bhīkṣā vṛtti*). We brought back food, drink, and animals – donkeys, goats, and dogs. They kept dogs as a hobby. There used to be a lot of rabbits in this area, but not anymore. We killed only those animals, and we ate them. Now, a little while later, we have started to dislike that sort of thing. We used to make our resting-spots from place to place because we were incorrectly educated. (See Illustration 6.)

If we remember Tonkin's injunction to explicate the three temporalities of performances of oral history, we will recall that the first temporality is the remembered past of the text. The remembered temporality within this text, however, similar to many interviews I took and conversations in which I participated, jumps between temporalities. Some of the statements represent a remembered past, some are a reuse of the words of others, some (like the reference to the Gurujī) are from a mythical time, and some are contemporary. This mixing of temporalities in the representation of the past constructs the predominantly represented past – here, that general Kalbeliya past – as more meaningful. For example, the general Kalbeliya past is first linked to the Gurujī. For many Kalbeliyas, the quick oral reference to their guru Kanipāvjī in a larger discussion of itinerancy, begging, snakes, or some other metonymic representation of the not-now, is the starting point of life in the *jaṅgal* and hence the community's relationship to these metonyms. The second temporality used to construct the past as meaningful is the current, in which the Ādivāsīs and other similar communities, *but not Kalbeliyas*, continue to rely on the *jaṅgal* for survival.

As the son of the *sarpañc sāhib*, Kānnāth Derāṇ, often referred to as one of the most adamant supporters of education and social reform, Śaṅkarnāth's representations of the past exhibit strategies of critique and argument similar to those



Illustration 6. Temporary Kalbeliya housing structure, outside Phāgī village. Photo by Yasmine Singh.

of Pūraṇnāth Ḍaglā. Some of the larger preoccupations recurrent in my interview with Jagdīśnāth and Śaṅkarnāth are seen here: a narrative which emphasizes a move from the “wrong” or “incorrect” (*galat*) social practices of Kalbeliyas in the old times (itinerancy; the keeping of animals such as dogs, chickens, and donkeys; the hunting of animals such as rabbits, large lizards, partridges, and porcupines; not sending children to school; begging) to the acceptable practices for which this type of past-representation argues (education of children; living permanently in houses on settled land; the use of horses in weddings, as in weddings of high-caste Hindus; the burial of the dead in a known and accessible place, and the fulfillment of funeral obligations within twelve days after death). Particularly in the case of Jagdīśnāth’s representation, a major catalyst for the changes in the narrative was Kānnāth Derāṇ. I cannot help but think that this attribution of catalyst-quality to Kānnāth may have been included

strategically in the presence of his son, Śaṅkarnāth. However, I heard several times – and too, when not in the company of anyone directly related to the *sarpañc sāhib* – that Kānnāth had, indeed, initiated a number of changes in the *pañcāyat* which effected the eradication of “wrong” Kalbeliya social practice. With the interviews of both Jagdīśnāth and Śaṅkarnāth, then, the two objectives of this chapter begin to take shape. We have a growing image of the remembered Kalbeliya past, with specific attention paid to the material and social aspects of itinerancy. Additionally, we see how the repertoire of themes from this remembered past can be used – or not used – in the presentation of certain arguments.

The following interview was also taken in Kālvār village, although on a different occasion than that above. Yasmine Singh and I had noticed Banvārīnāth Paṃvār making a thatched hut in the Kalbeliya neighborhood and asked Kālūnāth Aṭhvāl about what he was doing. Kālūnāth then introduced us to Banvārīnāth and facilitated the interview from which the following is taken. While I return later to the interview with Banvārīnāth, here, I will focus on Kālūnāth’s words, and not on Banvārīnāth’s.

Kālūnāth Aṭhvāl: First, there was a curse on our *guru* that he [and his followers] would have neither a house in the village nor farmland in the *jaṅgal*, that we would keep wandering around.

Banvārīnāth Paṃvār: [The curse stated that] “You will keep roaming. You will keep wandering. And you will keep eating porcupines (*seḷā*) and large lizards (*cīpaṭ*).³⁷

³⁷ The word *cīpaṭ* is neither Hindi nor Rajasthani. It is the Kalbeliya word for a certain species of lizard which Kalbeliyas, in Jaipur at least, hunt and eat. As it is listed in no Dictionaries, and as I am no expert

Yasmine Singh: Why don't you wander around nowadays?

KA: Nowadays there isn't room enough for living. Before, at least fifty families would stay in five to seven village hamlets (*dhāṇī*). Out of us – out of the fifty families – twenty families would get up and leave together for another village. Plus, at least one hundred animals accompanied twenty families: donkeys, horses, camels, dogs, goats, etc.

YS: So each caravan had twenty families?

KA: Twenty, ten, twenty-five families would travel together. But there isn't space enough for that anymore. Plus, animals need grazing land and the *jaṅgal* in order to survive. And in order to wander around, we need villages and village hamlets (*gāv-dhāṇī*), but there are less now than before.

This text, like many, repeats Kanipāvījī's curse as the reason for itinerancy. However, Kālūnāth's answer is different than the many I have heard given to the question asked by Yasmine. While the most frequent answer would indicate a lack of schooling or correct understanding in the itinerant past, Kālūnāth here draws our attention to the spatial requirements of group itinerancy, citing their inability to be fulfilled as the reason for having settled. Kālūnāth's text does not present a problematic of radical change. Although he sends his four children to school, and wants them to receive education and work in occupations other than begging, Kālūnāth prides himself on his

in lizards, I do not know the species. This animal's other name – used more by Marvari Kalbeliyas living in Jaipur – is *goīrā*.

closer following of Kalbeliya “tradition” (*paramparā*) than do Śāṅkarnāth Derāṇ or Pūraṇnāth Ḍaglā.

The reader may have rightfully noticed that I have given only men’s accounts of itinerancy. To this I reply that my research focused almost exclusively on men. Men were more willing to spend time with me than women generally were, and I did not usually try to remedy this. There were a few women with whom I talked and whom I interviewed. All of these women were the close female friends and relatives of the better of my male friends. Occasionally, however, I did ask Yasmine Singh, my romantic and occasional research partner, to conduct an interview with certain women on my behalf. More often than not, Yasmine and I sat in on one-another’s’ interviews, and hence both our voices are present in our respective bodies of research. At my behest, Yasmine took the following interview for me, with Śānti Devī Paṃvār. Although I was present in the room, I spent most of the time whispering to Śānti Devī’s oldest son, Mahbūbnāth, about the interview. Śānti Devī, her husband Pūraṇnāth, and their children live in Kalākār Colony, across the street from Kālūnāth Aṭhvāl. Up until rather recently, Śānti Devī was the main bread-winner of the family, begging in the city, villages, and at Gāltājī, an important temple and regional pilgrimage site just outside Jaipur, where the family lived and begged with their five-legged cow for years before coming to Jaipur. The family is now supported by her son and daughter who work in Kalbeliya Dance Parties, and by another son who drives a taxi.

Yasmine Singh: Where did you used to live before?

Śānti Devī Paṃvār: I used to live in the *jaṅgal* before, which was nowhere near any village or neighborhood. We didn’t have electricity, a clearing in the woods, or

anything like that. We lived in the dark; we lived in the *jaṅgal*. Bugs or anything could just come near us; dogs and cats could come near us when we were sleeping like that in the *jaṅgal*. We got soaked when the rainy season came. We lived in huts and we remained soaked the whole time. [See Illustration 7.] Even when the sand was flying [as in a storm], we still made *roṭṭṣ* and ate in that bothersome condition; and we wrapped ourselves with those soaking wet clothes, and ate uncooked *roṭṭṣ*. Dust even fell on our *roṭṭṣ* or in our curries. Whirlwinds would come and our containers for food would fly off. Then we went looking for them and brought them back. We brought water from a distance of a mile or two. Sometimes we would even go the distance of a *kos* (about two miles) to fill up our clay pots with water. Then we drank it. We stole wood with which to make *roṭṭṣ*. We bathed once in one, two, four, or five days. There was not much water, even for drinking.

I had these stones for begging. I would take these stones and make an image of Mātājī in them. Then I would show them from door to door to door and they would give me one or two handfuls of grain. I brought that home. I would prosper, collect everything, and bring it home. Then I would grind it in a grindstone. What did I do? I woke up halfway through the night. Waking up halfway through the night, I ground that in the grindstone. Then I woke up in the morning and made *roṭṭṣ* and fed the children. Then I left to go beg. I brought it, ground it, and ate it. Then, I begged, brought it, ground it, and ate it. Yes. Other people brought the water. We stole wood and kept dogs. What did we feed them? We fed them ground grain and sometimes *roṭṭṣ* too. Doing things in this way, my children became distressed. I raised them in this troubled manner. My husband didn't earn anything.



Illustration 7. Kālūnāth’s and Jānkī Aṭhvāl’s sons, Mukeś and Rākeś, in front of a Kalbeliya tent (right).

Photo by Carter Higgins.

Perhaps the most illustrative example presented thus far, Śānti Devī’s draws our attention first to the living conditions of itinerancy and second to the tasks she performed as the economic provider and supporter of the family. It is important to note here the stone image of the goddess to which Śānti Devī referred. If the stereotypical Kalbeliya man walks around villages and cities, begging with his snake and his *pūṅgī*, then the stereotypical older Kalbeliya women does the same, except either with a stone image of the *sāto bahṇem* (“seven sisters”) placed in a large bamboo basket, or with an extra-legged cow. In both instances these women officiate *pūjā*. Like men, these women, too, beg for alms in the name of gods and goddesses during *melās* and at large temples and pilgrimage centers. I once saw Śānti Devī beg, and later in the paper we will return to her memories and claims of satisfaction with

the profession of begging. Hence, while many Kalbeliyas in Jaipur frequently conflate their dissatisfactions with begging with those regarding itinerancy, Śānti Devī is here an exception by virtue of her inclination towards begging. Śānti Devī uses the same repertoire of themes as Śaṅkarnāth and Pūraṇnāth – the Kalbeliya past – to argue a very different vision of caste-community. Śānti Devī's interview affords no view of the concern of the later with themes such as “progress” and “advancement,” located in the abandonment of that which constitutes the repertoire. Living outside does not seem to be the problem either. In her interview, Śānti Devī even told Yasmine and me that she plans to move back to Galtājī as soon as her daughter is married off, to beg and live there among a tent-caravan. It seems to me, from reading her interview, that Śānti Devī's unhappiness with itinerancy, attested to in the above passage, stems from the hardships of having to do everything for everyone in her family. She claimed that some of her best memories are of her deceased daughter and her husband, who helped Śānti Devī with all of the household work. This image of solitude and individual responsibility broadens the illustration of domestic semi-itinerancy, particularly regarding the previous example of the sharing and distribution of responsibilities among many families.

Reaffirming this break with community itinerancy, the following interview begins with a memory of the itinerancy of a singular household. I conducted this interview with Kailāśnāth Derāṇ, while we were on a pilgrimage to various temples in western Rajasthan. The three main stops on the tour were: the Gorā Bherū Bābā temple in Koḍamdesar, a village five or six kilometers outside of Bikaner; the central temple and pilgrimage site for Rāmdevjī in Rāmdevrā, near Jaisalmer; and the Kālā Bherū Bābā temple in Kucipalā, a small village in Nāgaur district.³⁸ This interview was

³⁸ The pilgrimage was initiated by Hīrānāth Derāṇ, of Ladānā, a village thirty kilometers outside of Jaipur, who had recently married his daughters off (or married them in, rather, as his sons-in-law

conducted in Koḍamdesar while we were waiting for the preparations of the *prasād* (the goat offering which Bherūjī consumed and returned to Hīrānāth Derāṇ) into a spicy Rajasthani curry.

Kailāśnāth Derāṇ: My mother and father wandered around; they did not live anywhere permanently. They made their own camp; they set up their tent-caravan in this village today and stayed here two days. Then they went ahead and set up their camp somewhere else. They kept traveling around like that; meaning, they did not live anywhere permanently. You will ask me, “Kailāśjī, where do you live?” Then, at that time, I would not have been able to tell you that “I live in the Falā alley.” Nowadays I will tell you that I live in Jaipur, I live in Savāījaysīhpurā. But before, they picked up their caravan everyday and left, so they had no address. And there was no education at that time. These were completely ignorant (*gaṃvār*) and uneducated people.

So, before, during that time, there was a lot of rain and a lot of agriculture. The unnecessary expenses – like the expenses of today – were fewer at that time. My father used to say, “Son, the man with 100 rupees is accepted as the most important man, the richest man.” My mother and father

moved into house). This meant two things for Hīrānāth. Firstly, many Kalbeliyas from in and around Jaipur travel with their entire family to Kucipalā after a wedding, to fulfill their responsibilities towards Kālā Bherūjī. Secondly, this was particularly imperative for Hīrānāth, who had asked for Bherūjī’s help in earning enough money to repay his loans from the wedding in time. Because Bherūjī had enabled Hīrānāth to successfully have his daughters married and to repay his debts on time, Hīrānāth needed to fulfill his promise of three goat offerings: one to Gorā Bherū Bābā on the way to Rāmdevrā, one to Kālā Bherū Bābā on the way home, and one again on his arrival home. Kailāśnāth is a close friend of Hīrānāth and a driver, so Hīrānāth had hired him to drive his family. I had met Hīrānāth a number of previous times, always through Pūraṇnāth Ḍaglā, who, knowing my interest in Bherūjī, insisted I go along with Hīrānāth and his family.

put on their wedding with this “one rupee each, fifty rupees each” kind of money. For his wedding, my papa’s oldest brother bought ten kilograms of clarified butter (*ghī*, necessary for oblations poured into the fire during the wedding ceremony) for one rupee. Ten kilograms of clarified butter was one rupee. It cost that much at that time. It was easy to survive then. Now, today, expenses have increased. Everything has changed: we no longer wander around.

This interview, as well as the following interview with Harjīnāth Aṭhvāl, shares much with the informants of Gold and Gujar in their *In the Times of Trees and Sorrows* (2002), referenced in the introduction. For example, Gold and Gujar found their informants reflecting on the past as agriculturally, culinarily, and morally superior to the present, but riddled with injustice and suffering uncharacteristic of their present. Similarly, Kailāśnāth’s and Harjīnāth’s articulations of comparison valorize the moral superiority of the past, in which Kalbeliyas did not make their daughters dance on stage (“*apnī beṭī ko sṭej pe nahīm nacāte*”), while simultaneously critiquing its characteristic ignorance and regretful practices of itinerancy and begging.³⁹ In both instances, education and settled living solve many of the problems of the Kalbeliya past. Our broadening image of the remembered Kalbeliya pasts of itinerancy and its practices here becomes a thematic used for a very different problematic than we saw in Śānti Devī’s text; this has more in common with the problematic in Pūraṇnāth Ḍaglā’s and Śaṅkarnāth Derāṇ’s texts.

³⁹ While both men did discuss the superior quality of food and preparation in the “village” and in previous times, I do not here include excerpts. For those interested in such topics, see Gold and Gujar (2002).

The following interview was conducted with Harjīnāth Aṭhvāl in his village, Kālvār, referred to above. He is the paternal cousin of Kālūnāth Aṭhvāl, and he also shows snakes to foreigners at City Palace in Jaipur. Additionally, he sings and plays the harmonium in all-night *bhajan*-singing parties (*jāgaraṇ*).⁴⁰ Every time we met, I spent a lot of time talking with Harjīnāth, who was interested in Rajasthani and Indian history, music, and theological notions of the subtle workings of the human body. The portion of the interview presented here begins with a discussion of the circumstances of the interview: the funeral feast and the following *jāgaraṇ* on the twelfth night following a death.

Harjīnāth Aṭhvāl: When someone from our community died before, we performed the *nuktā* (funeral feast)⁴¹ one, two, six months later, two to five years, ten years after the death. We sometimes even performed it twenty years later. In this age such a rule (*niyam*) has been enacted whereby – today is the twelfth day – on the twelfth day we have to perform the *nuktā*. This thing that happens in our community on the twelfth day happens in all other communities as well. The one on whom the shawl (*caddar*) is placed becomes the head of the household. The other communities tie a turban on his head. But those of us who wear

⁴⁰ Kalbeliya *jāgaraṇs* are immensely interesting events, and might serve as a fruitful future research topic. At these events, after being fed by the sponsor of the *jāgaraṇ*, everyone sits on mats, divided by gender and with a central and well-lit location as their focal point. Here, *gurus*, their promising students, and a *dholak* player sit in a semi-circle, and take turns playing harmoniums and singing *bhajans*. After each *bhajan*, the microphone is passed around and the *gurus* argue over the meaning the *bhajans*. This seems to be the only organized event in which marijuana figures an important and collective role. The *gurus* eventually pass their *cillans* to the audience, who spend most of the time talking amongst themselves, and among whom the host distributes tea, cigarettes, and *bīṛs*.

⁴¹ The definition for *nukto* in Sakariya's (1984) Rajasthani-Hindi dictionary refers the reader to *nugto*, the fourth definition of which is "mr̥tyubhoj; nuktā." *Mr̥tyubhoj*, or "funeral feast," is the meaning Harjīnāth and other Kalbeliyas intend in naming such an event *nuktā*.

bhagvā (the ochre-colored robes of ascetics) tie this *bhagvā* shawl around him – the shawl of our *guru*. This has been occurring according to tradition for a long time. Everyone from the community comes together and wraps him with this shawl ... [During these types of events,] we used to eat off of metal plates, metal utensils, and metal bowls, but now we have started to eat off of disposable plates made from leaves (*pattal*). Many of the old opinions, such as the practice of bowing down (*nat-nem*) have been removed. Things are very good these days – you have probably gone to several weddings.

Carter Higgins: Yes.

HA: So you must have seen things in weddings like horses and musical instruments.

We never had horses or musical instruments in our weddings before. This was a boon from our *guru*.⁴² We had such a boon given by our *guru* Kanipāv that we will never have houses in the village nor fields or wells in the *jaṅgal*. We will never own any land. We had that boon but our principles (*siddhānt*) and opinions have changed and now we are happy. Some people have even abandoned all of our previous opinions. We are trying to transform our community.

⁴² When Kalbeliyas ascribe certain practices to the curse placed on Kanipāv by Gorakhnāth, they occasionally use the word “curse” (*śrap*, *sarp*, or *śāp*) and occasionally “boon” (*vardān*). The later is used, as seen in Harjīnāth’s interview, even when the problematic of the statement is the devaluation of the practices initiated by the receipt of this “boon.” Ostensibly, every gift from the Guru is a boon, even if undesired.

Before there were many rules similar to that requiring us to bow our heads (*nat-nem*).⁴³ We did not have horses in our weddings before because it was the rule of the great kings (*rājāmahārājā*).⁴⁴ The rule of the great kings mandated such an order whereby only they brought horses, only they sat on horses. There was a rule by which they did not allow others to sit on horses. They wore very nice clothes and did not allow others, like us, to wear such clothing. Today the ruling body has changed, and our opinions have changed along with it. The thing about horses, musical instruments, disposable plates made from leaves, and tents⁴⁵ – like ours which has been set up over there – is that they indicate the transformations which have occurred in all communities. Before it was not just our community; all communities had to live in fear ...

The great kings never traveled with a bare head during their rule. They only wandered around after tying [a turban] around their head and only wearing *jūtī* (pointy camel-leather shoes popular in Rajasthan). They never left their village. Our community was from among the *saṃnyāsīs* (ascetics). You know *saṃnyāsīs*, right– *sādhu-sant* (ascetics and saints)? The *nāth sampradāy* is one *panth* (sect) from among them. We were discerning, and had been for some time, during the time when there were so many allegations against the

⁴³ I assume that Harjīnāth is referring here to the obligation of lower caste- and class-groups to perform deference in the presence of certain higher caste- and class-groups, such as Rajputs. Because his comment regarding *nat-nem* initiates a discussion of royal practices and insistence of social inequality, I take this to mean that Harjīnāth is claiming that Kalbeliyas were obliged to lower their heads in the presence of Rajputs.

⁴⁴ For an excellent study of the memories of Rajasthani of the time of the *rājāmahārājā* as “great kings,” see Gold and Gujar (2002).

⁴⁵ Here Harjīnāth is referring to metal-framed tents used for weddings, funerals, etc. in Rajasthan, not to the tents in which itinerant Kalbeliyas live(d). It is telling that he uses the English word “tent” to refer to these, while he elsewhere uses the Hindi *tripāl* to refer to those of Kalbeliya residence.

other castes. For example, we went out begging for *roṭī* from some people, and for grain from other people in the villages and neighborhoods.

Before, opinions were formed out of fear and anger, so that we did not wear nice clothing, eat good food, or engage in pleasurable activities. Times have changed today. Look, now is the rule of everyone. We learned to live under this government. The government has also taken certain measures to get rid of the discrimination of higher and lower. Before, in the villages, and even now, there was this untouchability (*chūtāchūt*). It still exists outside [the cities]. But things have changed quite a bit with the arrival of this government.

Harjīnāth valorizes the ascetic origins of his community even amidst a critique of the ensuing degraded position of Kalbeliyas within the social inequality of his remembered past. This move seems to be in line with Harjīnāth's personality: we enjoyed many discussions about the nature of the universe, the body, and the liberation (*mokṣa*) from these two. However, I found Harjīnāth to be equally interested in social inequality and history. This text sees him more interested in the latter. With Harjīnāth, we see the “progress” or “advancement” of the Kalbeliya caste-community not only in the efforts of the *sarpañc sāhib*, or in any other single arena, but also in multiple processes which have joined forces. In a rather sophisticated account, Harjīnāth refers to settled living, pressures for assimilation within the new social structures in which settled living has placed Kalbeliyas, democracy and the efforts of the state to address caste discrimination, and most importantly Kalbeliya agency. Hindi has a different way of conceptualizing agency than English. For example, a direct translation into Hindi of the English sentence, “I broke my arm,” would seem ridiculous to Hindi speakers, because of the agency attributed to the speaker in this sentence – the speaker must have purposefully and knowingly broken

her arm. The more appropriate – and truthful – translation would be, “my arm broke.” Hence, Harjīnāth’s claim, “our principles and opinions have changed,” contains no agency; but his comment that “some people have even abandoned all of our previous opinions,” and that “we are trying to transform our community,” contain agency explicitly. In Harjīnāth’s account, while *there are changes happening*, there are also *people who are actively pursuing change*.

An important mitigating factor these changes, Harjīnāth told me, is that many of those remembered practices were inspired by a lack of education and a fear of the higher caste- and class-communities. Continuing his theme of ignorance and fear as influential characteristics of the past, Harjīnāth here moves from talking about funeral feasts, to weddings.

Harjīnāth Aṭhvāl: We used to wander around with our caravans. So before, the family of the bride all traveled in one caravan and the family of the groom traveled in one caravan. But the engaged boy used to live with the parents of his fiancé. Everybody lived and traveled together, taking the caravan. Before, when there was a wedding, the [rites in preparation for the wedding] for the groom-to-be, such as the tying of the *bān-biṭā* (a long, wound strung tied on to the wrist of the groom, decorated with auspicious items such as a tiny shell, betel nut, turmeric, etc.) and the *haldī-pīṭhī* (when the immediate female relatives of the groom apply turmeric to his body and make an image of Gaṇeś out of soil), were all performed at the camp of his in-laws. Nowadays people have built houses. Our neighbors and people from different castes tell us “Brother, this is wrong. You should send for the wedding process (*bārāt*) just as we send for it” (i.e. The bride’s family should invite the groom’s family to come to their house for the wedding in the same manner as other castes). This [change] occurred

five-ten, fifteen-twenty years ago. We don't invite the groom to our house anymore; we don't keep him around or make him work for us. Nowadays our wedding procession comes in the same way as everyone else's; we invite them in the same way. Just like them we have horses and musical instruments; we give *dahez* (bride-dowry) to our daughters. But it wasn't like that before – it was less, around ten percent.

Harjīnāth's text furthers this paper's intention to present memories in an attempt to construct a thick illustration of Kalbeliya pasts by drawing our attention to kinship rites – funerals and weddings – and social hierarchies – untouchability and obligations to perform deference to Rajputs. Additionally, Harjīnāth's representation of the past, present, and relationships in between the two, is a socially constructed argument relating to the interview's present temporality and the trajectories of the Kalbeliya caste-community. How shall we characterize the context of this argument? To begin, it is helpful to recognize that Harjīnāth's statements such as "things are very good these days," "our principles (*siddhānt*) and opinions have changed and now we are happy," and

"we are trying to transform our community" all place Harjīnāth among a group of Kalbeliyas, like Pūraṇnāth Ḍaglā and Kailāśnāth Derāṇ, who appreciate the present of my fieldwork over and against a remembered past of ignorance and poverty. Although these three men generally have more to argue about than upon which to agree, two common and major tropes in their strategic representations of this remembered past are education and permanent residence, missing in the age of ignorance and poverty, but present increasingly more in the lives of Kalbeliyas. In these tropes, then, we find a central problematic in many – but not all – Kalbeliya representations of past. We will

examine them once more with relation to itinerancy, before moving onto remembered services rendered.

Another Kalbeliya man with whom I became friendly acquaintances and conversation partners is Bansīnāth Paṃvār. Bansīnāth was a middle-aged man from Ākheṛā village, around ten kilometers outside of Jaipur with a large Kalbeliya population. He wandered around Jaipur and its surrounding villages, begging sometimes with snakes, but mostly dressed as a *sādhu*. Although I spent more time with him than I did with other Kalbeliyas with whom I conducted longer and more in-depth interviews, I conducted only two short interviews with Bansīnāth, who was very nervous when the voice recorder was turned on. The following excerpt is taken from one of those recordings. I conducted this interview on May 8, 2009, at the entrance to the Mahāmāyā temple in Chomūṃ, around an hour's drive outside of Jaipur. I had gone to Mahāmāyā with Kālūnāth Aṭhvāl, who had gone to meet Pārbātī Devī and Sāgarnāth, his sister and brother-in-law of Kālūnāth, and the parents of the boys to which their daughters were to be wed. Always knowledgeable about and motivated to work in weddings, Kālūnāth had brought along his family, the families of several of his brothers, his neighbor and relative Kesarnāth and his wife, and me. Bansīnāth and several other older Kalbeliya men who had come to Mahāmāyā to beg were invited to sit in on the wedding discussions which were held in one of Mahāmāyā's *dharmśālās*. I had run into Bansīnāth two days before this meeting, when I had gone with Kālūnāth's family to the Bālājī (Hanumān) temple in Samot, a regionally important pilgrimage site a few kilometers away from Mahāmāyā. A month-long festival was under celebration at the Samot Bālājī temple and Bansīnāth had taken the bus there to receive *darśan* and to beg for alms in front of the temple.

Bansīnāth Pamvār: Understand this: we used to travel around before, setting up our tents from one place to another. We set up our tent here one day, then picked up everything and moved forward the next day. We wandered around like that. We are an itinerant caste (*ghumakkar jāti*). So, we didn't understand: we didn't have houses or buildings anywhere and we just traveled around like that. But we understand a little now, so people have started constructing houses from place to place. For example, people have started receiving support from the government. We used to do this begging business (*māṅgne kā kām*). Well, we still do this begging business, like begging for a living (*bhikṣā vṛtti*): begging for flour, begging for money, supporting our children. I do this type of work. But now people have constructed houses everywhere, people have started living [in one place] permanently. We have created a value for ourselves; we have established our value but still our old men beg – they still support their children by working hand to mouth. Take these people for example [the people with whom we were sitting]: they used to beg. Now they sell these goods in which they have made investments. [The Kalbeliya family, under whose tarp we were sitting, had created a make-shift store where they sold women's cosmetic goods, toys, *pūjā* items, etc. (to which they generally referred as fancy items) to pilgrims and especially their children.]

Bansīnāth's comments are useful for understanding what, for him, constitutes the poor and correct understandings in his community. After describing the previous era, during which Kalbeliyas lived in tents and wandered around, he casually stated “so, we didn't understand,” as if this was implied and a necessary conclusion to draw, given the characterization of the past. Living permanently in one place and receiving support from the government are characterized as indicative of correct understanding,

while itinerancy is characterized as indicative of poor understanding. Begging, however, has an ambivalent place in this dichotomy. The young family with whom we were sitting was praised for having ceased begging and made financial investments in their business. However, while certainly more characteristic of the earlier age, and hence possibly more associated with a poor or lack of understanding, old men, who live in one place permanently in this age of better understanding, continue to wander around, begging for a living, and to support their families. This ambivalence towards begging presents a nice contrast to the well articulated arguments of previous interviews, both those in favor of and those dismissive of remembered practices. Bansīnāth's interview allows us to observe the un-determined nature of problematics, which actors debate, grapple with, and reformulate. That is to say, Kalbeliyas are engaged with their memories and conceptions of the past, present, and futures of their caste-community in sophisticated and creative manners.

Conclusion

This chapter opened with the claim that Kalbeliyas draw creatively from a repertoire of images of the past when they discuss and represent their caste-community. By examining interviews conducted by the author and his research partners, this chapter has tried to use these with two objectives in mind. In the first, I have attempted to construct a “thick” illustration of the pasts of Kalbeliya itinerancy. Salient features of this picture include various efforts at subsistence: Kalbeliya men and women begged and hunted for food, which might then be distributed among the members of both single and multiple family caravans. Moving from village to village and occasionally through cities, they relied on their animals, with which some people had emotional ties. Sometimes this past is described as the inherited curse or boon from Guru Kanipāvji. There were many difficulties combated during these times; occasionally

these were physical – lack of adequate shelter and means of protecting food and body from weather changes and wild animals – and occasionally they were social – caste and political-economic hierarchies.

In this chapter's second objective, this repertoire, is used by different people to articulate various arguments for conceptualizing the present and future trajectories of the Kalbeliya caste community. Here the elements of this repertoire are arranged in such a way, and attributed with such qualities, that personal visions may be offered and debated through an appropriated language. It is in this sharing of the thematic of the past that one may note an instance of the “imagining” of Kalbeliya caste-community: using this collection of Kalbeliya pasts and memories to make an argument for the state or future of this community performs community membership while creating that to which one belongs. If this characterization holds, then this chapter has also tried to present one method by which Kalbeliyas engage with and reproduce their caste-community. This might have been what Bourdieu had in mind when he said: “belonging to a group is something you build up, negotiate and bargain over, and play for” (1990: 75). Pursuing these objectives further, the next chapter will deal with the strategies of remembered practices of Kalbeliya begging.

CHAPTER 4

“YOU WON’T HAVE FIELDS IN THE *JANĠAL*”:
SERVICES IN THE VILLAGE

Introduction

The general identification of Kalbeliyas as “traditional snake-charmers” is less informative in an English-medium academic context than its Hindi equivalent, *pāramparik saṃperā*,⁴⁶ might be in a village in Rajasthan. For, those individuals in the Rajasthani village may remember the multiple services provided by transient Kalbeliyas when they stopped in the village a few times a year. It seems appropriate that this section, an attempt to discuss the remembered begging and social practice of a well known itinerant caste-community from Rajasthan, begin with a statement about this itinerancy and social practice made by a well-known and respected Rajasthani. An influence on, resource for, and friend to many scholars working in Rajasthan, the late Komal Kothari, too, had an interest in Kalbeliyas. This quote is taken from Bharucha’s (2003) reworked and reworded conversations with Kothari, from part of Kothari’s discussion of the nomadic groups of Rajasthan, of which he claims there are nearly eighty.

⁴⁶ The Hindi word *paramparā*, which is the root for *pāramparik*, shows up a number of times in this chapter. D. Gold (1987: 85) claims that *paramparā* signifies “‘tradition’ in many of its imprecise English senses, but it can also refer more specifically to an extended lineage of gurus and disciples.” While Kalbeliya use of this word does not generally refer to a lineage as specific as Gold’s text does, neither is it as imprecise as the English “tradition.” I propose to read Kalbeliyas’ general use of the word *paramparā* as that which conforms to the imagined and remembered repertoire of skilled and social practice of the Kalbeliya *buzurg*, or venerable ancestors. This word, and the repertoire of practice it may refer to in various situations, is a powerful tool in the construction of arguments about the Kalbeliya caste-community.

It is important to differentiate nomads from beggars, those vagrants who can be found begging for a livelihood in bus and railway stations and on the streets. Nomads are not beggars: they provide certain types of services for which society is obliged to provide them with food. The services are primarily of a technical nature, which are not otherwise available in the villages. But the Jogis also perform other functions that combine ritualistic services and other kinds of indigenous expertise. So, at one level, for example, the Kālbeliās are recognized as snake-charmers, but let us be clear as to what snake-charming means. The snake is regarded by many communities as the embodiment of God, and the Kālbeliā are regarded as the priests of the snake. They carry their makeshift snake shrines to local neighborhoods, where they play on the gourd-pipe (*pungi* or *bīn*), while offerings of milk and donations are made by individual families. This ritual is not for entertainment purposes. But only 5 per cent of the Kālbeliā are involved in this snake-worship. (Bharucha 2003; 53-54).

While Kothari's illustration of Kalbeliya snake-charming, as an example of the nomadic service of Jogīs in general, draws our attention to an important aspect of that practice, namely, its ritualized character, his assertion that snake-charming is not entertainment contradicts both my experience and my interviews with Kalbeliyas. Not only is snake-charming both ritualized *and* entertaining, the disconnection of one from the other may be rooted in an assumed dichotomy between "religious" ritual and "secular" entertainment.⁴⁷ Following Bell (1992), I will leave the characterization of snake-charming outside of the realm of "ritual," preferring instead to find in individual performances of snake-charming the strategies of ritualization (differentiation) employed. Certain acts of showing snakes, then, will present

⁴⁷ It needs to be noted that Kothari was not a scholar in the academic study of religion. Here, rather than critiquing Kothari directly (who was certainly far more intimately acquainted with Kalbeliyas than I), my intention rather is to set the stage for the analysis of this paper.

themselves more or less ritually, and more or less as entertainment, depending on its time, place, and environment.

By considering some excerpts of my interviews dealing with services remembered to have been rendered by Kalbeliyas in the time of itinerancy, this chapter, like the last, seeks to use individual memories – performative representations of the past, which may become part of a circulated body of memories constructing something similar to a “public culture” – to give a “thick,” enmeshed, and robust illustration of the pasts of Kalbeliya skilled practice, particularly involving snakes, performances of asceticism, and music and dancing. While the last chapter sought to explicate some ways in which this collection of memories could form a thematic repertoire for the presentation of an argument, or a problematic, this chapter’s main focus is to clarify some aspects of this thematic. More specifically, the two forms of remembered practice described in this chapter are of the Kalbeliya as ritual specialist and entertainer. Therefore, this section proposes that different forms of begging are actually only practices which utilize different “strategies” of begging.⁴⁸ Before turning to the first section, I present an interview in which the speaker moves easily between representations of the Kalbeliya begging strategies of the ascetic-beggar and the entertainer.

⁴⁸ My use of “strategy” follows that proposed by Bourdieu (1990: 55-75). In order to avoid talking about “rules” of social behavior, and hence the construction of an analytical “model” through which to understand social practice, Bourdieu indicates the “real principle” behind “strategy”: the “practical sense,” “feel for the game,” or “practical mastery of the logic” of the social world (1990: 61). This mastery is achieved through experience and is “outside conscious control and discourse” (*ibid*). Far from exacting or foolproof, this mastery “presupposes a permanent capacity for invention” and improvisation in “indefinitely varied and never completely identical situations” (63). Strategies often arise out of “power relations,” which are intelligible only “by appealing to the history of [the] group” (69).

The following is a translation of an excerpt of my interview with a man named Chaugnāth Cauhāṇ, who lives in Kalākār Colony in Jaipur. Chaugnāth's family originally wandered around in the district of Bhīlvāṛā, during which time Chaugnāth, a child, begged with snakes. After moving to Jaipur with his family, he lived in a tent, squatting on land near the brass factory, along with many of the other Kalbeliya families. As an adolescent, Chaugnāth worked construction, and started driving a cycle-rickshaw after the death of his father. At that point, Chaugnāth, who at eighteen years old was the youngest of three brothers, supported his family and arranged the weddings of his older brothers. After ten years of driving a cycle-rickshaw, Chaugnāth and his brothers started a business, making spice-grinding stones (*silā loṛṣ*), where he worked for the next twenty years. Eventually, Chaugnāth and his family moved to Kalākār Colony in Pānī Pec, and his wife became a dancer. At the time that I conducted this interview, Chaugnāth, like many other middle-aged Kalbeliya men whose wives danced, did not currently work; his wife supported their family.

Chaugnāth Chauhāṇ: Before, we didn't have all that we have now, like houses. My father lived in a tent. There were donkeys and they used to seat the children on top of the donkeys. One day in this village, then the next day in that village. We were an itinerant caste (*ghumakkaṛ jāti*). We did the work of begging to eat (*māṃgne-khāne kā kām*). We begged and then ate.

Carter Higgins:⁴⁹ How did you beg?

⁴⁹ Henceforth, CH.

CC: We went into the village and begged for alms. It was the work of begging. [They would say] “Bābājī has come. Give him one *roṭī*. Give flour. Give curry and *roṭī*. Give.” They begged.

CH: They became a *bābā* and begged (*bābā banke māṃgte the*)?

CC: They became a *bābā* and begged for alms (*bhīkh*). Everyone in our caste community begged. No one does that here today; today is a gift from God...

Kālūnāth Aṭhvāl: Before, did your mother, father, and you used to beg with snakes?

CC: The snake was our work – our daily bread. We couldn’t live without the snakes. We showed the snakes; we showed the games [of the snakes] to the children. We showed the snakes, played the *ḍamrū* (small, two-faced drum; often associated with Śiva) and *bīn*. We have a *khañjīrī* (Hindi: *ḍaphlī*, a small, circular drum made of wood and covered with lizard skin). We played that. All of the boys and girls of the village danced.

CH: Why did they dance?

CC: Before, the boys and girls used to dance. And having made them dance, we claimed a space in the village. That space was near the *sarpañcī* or somewhere; that place was somewhere to sit with some sunshine. Then we would collect grains. Those people would give us flour, grains, *chāch* (buttermilk), *rābrī* (thickened, sweet milk). We would take the *chāch* and *rābrī* and then come home. Then, at night, half-way through the night, we left. There

was some funeral feast (*nuktā*) occurring, or some wedding. We went there. The children and everyone – they all left. We would go there and, having eaten and drank, come back and go to sleep. That is why we were an itinerant caste.

First, Chaughnāth's words here may be characterized as a representation of a general past. Even though there is occasional reference to Chaughnāth's parents, the overall spirit of Chaughnāth's descriptions are of a general and collective nature. Chaughnāth's mention of his father in the beginning is an example of or a reference for Kalbeliyas' itinerancy and houseless-ness. Beyond these comments on the character of its representation, it is important to note that this interview draws attention to the use of snake and *bīn* in the service of both begging and entertaining; Chaughnāth's text is divided into two halves, both of which deal primarily with the socioeconomic practices of the Kalbeliyas of Chaughnāth's memory. The two portions are each characterized by one important strategy of remembered Kalbeliya skilled practice: those of the ascetic-beggar and the entertainer. Having witnessed one instance in which a Kalbeliya might describe ascetic begging and entertaining as two sides of the same coin, we shall now attempt to focus more on each side. This is not an effort, however, to explain the entire "system" by breaking it down into components. As we have seen, the indication of variously showing the snake to entertain children, and by saying "Bābājī has come, give me money," indicates the use of strategy in Kalbeliya skilled practice, relative to space, time, and audience. The endeavor to discuss ascetic begging and entertaining separately, then, is an exercise in studying strategy. Now we turn to the ritualization of begging.

Services in the Village – the Ritualized Beggar

I start this section, not with a memory of the past, but with the translation of a recording I took of a Kalbeliya man showing snakes to pilgrims at the Samot Bālājī temple in Chomūṃ district, an hour and a half outside of Jaipur. The reason I give this recording is to help the reader imagine the practices described below. The following was recorded on the sidewalk at the bottom of the steep hill leading up to the temple. Yasmine Singh and I traveled to this location with my research assistant Kālūnāth Aṭhvāl, his wife and kids, his neighbor and distant relative Śānti Devī Paṃvār and her son Mukeśnāth, and Yasmine Singh, on one of the temple's festival days. There were nearly fifteen Kalbeliya men and women begging with snakes, with stone images of the Seven Sisters, with two different five-legged cows, with medical herbs and roots, and posing as Brahmins, reading horoscopes and selling accompanying stones.

Savāīnāth Paṃvār: O Rām! Good things will happen to your son; this is the *nāg* of Bholā (another name for Śiva) lying here. Leave after giving, my son. Good things will happen to you.

Good things will happen to you and your husband. Leave after giving, O *bhagat*. This is a snake who gives *darśan* (*dārśanik nāg*). Give one or two rupees to the *nāg* of Bholā before leaving.

Leave after giving, O older sister. Good things will happen to your husband. The snake who gives *darśan* is lying here. Leave after giving and your tasks will be completed successfully.

Leave after paying the debt of *dharm*, O son. Pay the debt and leave, O *rājā*. Do your service to the *nāg* and leave; then Bholenāth (Śiva) will fulfill your desire.

Leave, big sister, leave after giving. Good things will happen to your husband. He will fulfill your wish. Leave after giving, O son.⁵⁰ He will give you a son. The snake lying here gives *darśan*.

Leave having given. Leave having given one rupee, which is the *dharm* of one who does not go back on one's exchanges.⁵¹ Mātā Rām will fill your sons and grandsons with joy.

Give and leave. Stand up and leave having given. He will give you beneficence and he will cause others to give you only beneficence.

He will fulfill your wishes, O *rājā*. Give one rupee and leave.

Victory be to you, O big sister. Give and leave. Rām will give you the goodness of a son.

Leave having given, O big *sāhib*. Rām will fulfill your wishes. Give and leave, O *sarpañc sāhibjī*. There is a *nāg* who gives *darśan* lying here.

This translation of what a Kalbeliya *might* say while they are begging with a snake – indeed, it is very similar to much of the Kalbeliya begging I witnessed – exhibits some of the strategies of ritualization I try to highlight in what follows.

While snake-charming at tourist sites in Rajasthan assumes a function primarily of entertainment, Kalbeliya memories paint a picture of begging practices which employ strategies of ritualization. Bell claims that the focus on “ritual” as discrete events in anthropology and religious studies removes these actions from the sphere of social action and from the discourses in which they appear (1992: 13-16).

⁵⁰ Savāināth is using the masculine noun *beṭā*, “son,” to address a woman. This is common practice in Hindi.

⁵¹ Savāināth said “*de jā. ek rupae de jā utartī peṭhī kā dharm.*” Sakariya's Rajasthani-Hindi dictionary (1984) defines *peṭ-utār* as *bece gaye māl ko vāpas nahīm lene kā niyam yā śart*, or “the rule or condition of not taking back those goods one has sold.”

Choosing to focus instead on “strategies” of “ritualization,” and hence attempting to relocate these actions within general social action, Bell describes these processes as seeking to differentiate themselves from other actions (74). Central to ritualization is what Bell calls the “ritual body,” infused with a “‘sense’ of ritual” through interactions with its “structured and structuring” environment (98).⁵² In this section of the paper, I examine two accounts of the pasts of Kalbeliya male begging and two of female begging, both of which employ strategies of ritualization, differentiating Kalbeliya begging from other forms of begging through their bodily practices in certain time and space. Additionally, these sets of practices share an emphasis on the material environment, particularly the accoutrements of begging. However, important distinctions between the begging methods of men and women are raised in the following interviews: while both men and women utilize similar strategies of ritualization in their respective begging practices, men discuss theirs in connection with their ascetic identities. Women’s begging methods, on the other hand, do not generally replicate that of ascetics in performance. While women’s methods of begging with snakes and extra-limbed cows do seem to be particular to Kalbeliya women, doing so with a stone image of the Seven Sisters is not. This practice is common among certain other semi-itinerant caste-communities in Rajasthan, whose caste and class statuses are similar to those of Kalbeliyas, and therefore is not representative of a distinctly Kalbeliya style. With these strategies in mind, let us turn to memories about the skilled practices of Kalbeliya beggars.

⁵² Another important aspect of ritualization in Bell’s account is that power relations are “mastered” within the body, and domination and resistance are negotiated in actions utilizing strategies of ritualization (1992: 182, 196, 204). Although contestations of power, dominance, and resistance are certainly an important part of Kalbeliya social life, I do not pursue their explication here. For more on this, see the following chapter.

The following interview was taken in Bhairvāi village, Ajmer District, four hours from Jaipur.⁵³ I took this interview on a trip to Ajmer District with Kālūnāth Aṭhvāl and his family, to attend a wedding. Pūraṇnāth and Śānti Devī Paṃvār, who live across the street from and are related to Kālūnāth, had recently contributed a portion of the money for a car, purchased by their son Mukeśnāth and some of his friends as a business endeavor into taxi service. I packed into the car with eight adults and four children from Kalākār Colony, and drove to Bhairvāi, the residence of Bansīnāth Derāṇ and one of the grooms to be, before traveling with the wedding procession (*bārāt*) to the house of the bride in Ajmer city for the ceremony.

Bansīnāth Derāṇ: It was like this – before they actually used to keep animals. They used to load their tents on top of the animals and wander around. (Asks Kālūnāth) Am I supposed to tell stuff like this? They begged for a living when they wandered around. They captured snakes and also took those along when they wandered around. They kept the snakes in large woven baskets with a lid, and then they would take them into neighborhoods. Then they would play the *pūṅgī* and *khañjīrī* and sing. People showed their snakes while playing the *ḍaphlī* and *pūṅgī*. People supported themselves by begging for alms after showing the snake and its game. They survived from that earning.

Only one man out of a hundred has the resources for agriculture. This land is otherwise idle. No one even has any land. Only one man out of a

⁵³ While I generally avoid over-referencing my interviews conducted more than an hour outside of Jaipur, I make exceptions for close relatives of inhabitants of Jaipur who frequently travel to Jaipur. Because Bansīnāth Derāṇ is related to many families living in Kalākār Colony, and frequently travels in and around Jaipur, begging, he is an actor in Kalbeliya social life in Jaipur, and thus his social practices (including the representation of the past) constitutes part of Kalbeliya social practice in and around Jaipur.

hundred receives ten or twenty *bīghās* of land (1.25 – 2.5 acres; one *bīghā* is around five eighths of an acre). This one man is from a poor neighborhood; it was his time so he received [the land]. Everyone from our community lags behind; now no one has any land for cultivation. One out of a hundred gets some of this work.

The other important thing is that we all go out into the streets wearing *bhagvā* (ochre-colored robes, the dress of ascetics). We go out begging after becoming *sādhus* (ascetics; “*sādhu banke cale jāte haiṃ*”) and eat whatever it is that we receive. Whoever has no land to cultivate will support themselves by whatever means are available. We wear the guise of *sādhus*. Let me tell you one thing – we are *bābās* (literally “father”; an endearing term used for ascetics). Our group is similar to those who look after cows or elephants; we support ourselves through this kind of work. If we earn five rupees then we will feed our children with just that. This is our work.

Bansīnāth’s description of begging is important because he gives both economic and social causes for Kalbeliya performances of ascetic-begging. Economically, no Kalbeliya has land or receives work, so they have to find some other way to support themselves. Because Kalbeliya (men) are, according to Bansīnāth, *bābās*, their answer to the problem of needing to gain income, without ownership of land to cultivate, is to wear the clothes of ascetics and to beg. The act of begging, and the necessarily accompanying act of “becoming” an ascetic – by wearing the clothes of an ascetic, having a beard, calling oneself an ascetic, etc. – are performed, functionally, in order to acquire the means to sustain life. Throughout my interview with Bansīnāth, he repeatedly states that Kalbeliyas living in his *dhānī* (caste neighborhood in a village) have literally no other work options. However, if one needed only to sustain life, what

is the necessity to wear ascetic garb? Could Bansīnāth not be as successful, or more, working as a street beggar? Of course, this would assume that begging is an activity somehow free of processes such as cultural education or socialization. Bansīnāth's comment that Kalbeliyas "are *bābās*" is interesting when added to this discussion because it glosses a kind of deceit in Kalbeliya ascetic begging. His statement indicated that begging is somehow intrinsic to their very beings; after describing an economic problem, and then an activity as its solution, Bansīnāth claims to be someone expected to perform the activity: "we are *bābās*." In Hindi, there are certain identities or forms of being a person may possess which may be expressed with both the verbs *honā* ("to be") and *bannā* ("to become"), like profession. There are other identities that may take both verbs only in very limited senses. An example of the later would be identities of familiar relation: once could conceivably *become* a family member, as in the cases of adoption or intimate friendships, but generally people *are* family members. This difference between verb usage is central to the discussion in Bansīnāth's interview, because he claims that Kalbeliya men *become* sādhus (*bannā*) because they *are* *bābās* (*honā*).

Bansīnāth's description of the performance of ascetic identity, with an emphasized necessity of certain sartorial practices, entails both bodily practice and its material environment (See Illustration 8).⁵⁴ Kalbeliyas begged *because* of financial need, but Kalbeliya men did so dressed in *bhagvā*, thereby performing ascetic identities, because they *are* somehow ascetics. In comparison to the Nāth Jogīs of Ajmer district, Rajasthan, in D. Gold's (1996, 1999a, 1999b, 2002) and A. Gold's work (1988; 1992), this certainly entails a different sense of possessing an ascetic identity. Bansīnāth later reiterated his point thusly:

⁵⁴ For more on sartorial practice in South Asia, see Cohn (1996; 106-43) and Tarlo (1996).



Illustration 8. Sāgarnāth, Kalbeliya ascetic-beggar, smoking hukā. Photo by Carter Higgins.

Bansīnāth Derāṇ: We travel in the village for five or ten days and then return home.

Then we go out in the other direction. We travel around in the camel-pulled cart and then we come back. In doing this we occasionally wear the guise of *sādhus*; we take the snakes and the *pūṅṅṣ* with us. We have to support ourselves this way.

CH: You wear the guise of *sādhus*?

BD: The guise of Kanipāvnāth is divinely powerful (*kudrat*). Nowadays, someone who has sex can wear this guise if they are starving to death. They may try to wear

the clothes of a *sādhū*, which was our original guise. We don't cremate our deceased, we bury them [just like deceased *sādhūs*]. It's like that.

Again, the two reasons Bansīnāth gives as to why Kalbeliyas beg wearing the clothes of ascetics are sustenance in the face of poverty and their ascetic identity. For Bansīnāth, Kalbeliyas retain an ascetic identity because their guru wore the clothes of an ascetic, which the original Kalbeliya ancestors inherited and wore. According to Kalbeliya narratives, the curse and subsequent *jaṅgal*-dwelling lifestyle of Kanipāvjī is shared with Kalbeliyas. Bansīnāth indicates here that they also shared his ochre-colored robes. The last aspect of ascetic identity Bansīnāth mentions in his case for Kalbeliya ascetic begging is their post-mortem affinity with ascetics and other Jogī Jātis.⁵⁵ The issue of sartorial practice in the performance of ascetic-identity, with its dual emphasis on both bodily practice and its material environment, requires further examination. For more, we turn to our next interview.

The following text is taken from an interview I conducted with Mahbūbnāth Paṃvār, the oldest son of Śānti Devī Paṃvār, whose interview was used in the previous chapter on itinerancy and will reappear below. At the time of this interview, Mahbūbnāth was in his early twenties, and had recently started working in Kalbeliya Dance Parties.

CH: Do you remember anything about living in the caravan?

Mahbūbnāth Paṃvār: Yes, I remember living in the caravan. Look, we used to beg.

We went out begging and we grazed sheep and goats.

⁵⁵ On the funeral cults of another Nāth Jogī caste in Rajasthan who bury their deceased, see A. Gold (1988: 99-123).

CH: What work did you do in the caravan?

MP: What work did I do? I did this work – meaning, the work of begging ... I went out begging with a snake in the village, door to door, or in the city – all places: in *melās* or at some temple. I grazed sheep and goats.

CH: How old were you when you started begging?

MP: I was somewhere between five to seven years old when I started begging.

CH: Did you take a snake along at that time?

MP: Yes, I took a snake along. Then we came here to Jaipur from the village. After coming to Jaipur we begged here in the city – Bāṛī Caupaṛ, Choṭī Chaupaṛ.⁵⁶ We wandered around and begged. Then we lived at Galtājī⁵⁷ and begged there. We did this begging work. After that we came here and my sister learned how to dance. Then we entered this program line. Now we work in programs, singing and dancing ...⁵⁸

CH: Who taught you how to beg?

⁵⁶ These are two of the largest intersections in the old city and both are large markets.

⁵⁷ Galtājī is a regionally important temple and pilgrimage site, just outside of Jaipur. For more on Galtājī, see Śānti Devī's interview below.

⁵⁸ Kalbeliyas often refer to the professional performance of Kalbeliya music and dance by the English words and phrases “program,” “program line,” “dance party,” “dance program,” “party,” and “party line.”

MP: My mother and father taught me how to beg, [saying] “Do this first. We do this, so you do it too. How will you fill your belly?” Therefore this was out daily work; we had to do this. I still do this work even today.

CH: What type of clothing do you wear where you go out begging?

MP: I wear *bhagvā* clothes. There is saffron-colored (*kesriyā kalar*) clothing; I wear that type of clothing. I have to wear a hat too; I have to wear a *kurtā* when I beg. I have to put on *tīlak* and things like that, necklaces and earrings.⁵⁹ I have to wear things like the *rudrākṣ* beads and become a *sādhū* or saint in order to go.

CH: Why do you wear these things when you go out begging?

MP: Because of the boon from our *guru*, we have to take the *bhagvā dress*, we have to take *jog*. We are Jogīs, right? We are Saperās. So we have to take *jog*. This is the book of our *guru*. Then, after taking *jog*, we go out begging for alms.

Despite the fact that this excerpt from my interview with Mahbūnāth is short, and that I had a difficult time getting the somewhat shy Mahbūnāth to answer my questions, there is quite a bit here with which to work. Indeed, Mahbūnāth broadens

⁵⁹ The word Mahbūnāth uses is *mumdrā*, which usually refers to the large earrings kām-phatās wear through holes made through the center of their cartilage. Mahbūnāth, however, does not have his ears split. I have seen a few Sāpērās wear fake earrings. Perhaps Mahbūnāth is referring to these and perhaps he just wears earrings in his lobes, which are pierced.

our image of the Kalbeliya skilled practice of ascetic begging, of education in this skilled practice, and of the explication of this practice.

Also of central interest here is Mahbūbnāth's use of the phrase "to take *jog*," or in Hindi, *jog lenā*. In *The Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary* (1993: 381), the definition of *jog* simply refers the reader to *yog*, which, in its Sanskrit form, *yoga*, is something infinitely more familiar than *jog* to most English speakers. Many Sanskrit words beginning with the letter "y" find their way into modern north-Indian dialects with a "j" replacing the "y," and a dropping of the final "-a" sound at the end of certain words. Are we, then, to understand *jog* to be synonymous with *yog*, and hence *jogī* with *yogī* and *jogaṇ* with *yoginī*? Because Jogī and Jogaṇ are important words of address and self-identification in Jaipur's Kalbeliya caste-community, this question is of central importance.

A. Gold asked this same question of the relationship between the Rajasthani *jātrā* and the Hindi *yātrā*, both of which we can here gloss as "pilgrimage" (1988: 136-46). Gold claims that, while most words whose "ya" have become "ja" retain their original meaning, some people who speak both Rajasthani and Hindi use the words to indicate different types of pilgrimage. A short trip to a nearby shrine of a regionally important deity, generally with the intention of asking for some sort of intervention, are generally referred to as *jātrā*, while longer trips to inter-regionally famous temples of pan-subcontinental deities, like Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa, without desires to seek cures or boons, are referred to as *yātrā*. It is perhaps humorous that what is identified with a "ja" is that which is local, because Kalbeliyas in Jaipur use the English word "local" to refer to something fake or of low quality. This characterization of members of Nāth Jogī Jātis, of caste-communities with hereditary connections to Nāth Jogī ascetics, was once proposed to me by Yogī Vaśiṣṭh Nāth, a Nāth *sādhū* and the *mahant* (head monk) of the Nāth monastery-temple in Pushkar. Yogī Vaśiṣṭh Nāth said *yogī yog*

kartā hai, jogī bhog kartā hai. This witty rhyme may be translated one of two ways, both of which are intended: “The Yogī performs yoga, while the Jogī enjoys sexual intercourse”; “The Yogī performs yoga, while the Jogī suffers for his sins.” That is to say, Jogīs don’t do what Yogīs do. While informed by a discourse different from and antagonistic to those informing Kalbeliya self-conception, Vaśiṣṭh Nāth’s comment, along with Gold’s explication, lead us in the right direction. The next move is to contextualize this understanding of the nuanced difference between “ya” and “ja” within Mahbūbnāth’s statement.

In the above text, Mahbūbnāth seems to conflate *jog* with *bhagvā*, using them both as the subject of the verb *lenā*, “to take.” For example, Mahbūbnāth claims, “Because of the boon from our *guru*, we have to take the *bhagvā* dress, we have to take *jog*.” The phrase “to take *jog*,” makes less sense if removed from this context. When Mahbūbnāth claims that “we have to take the *bhagvā* dress,” he does not mean that Kalbeliyas are compelled to physically accept or remove ochre-colored clothes from someone or somewhere, as is the case in the common use of the English “to take.” This use of *lenā* connotes the compulsory “adopting of” this type of clothing because of the curse placed on the Guru. Immediately after stating that “we have to adopt the ochre-colored clothing,” Mahbūbnāth repeats the sentence in structure and format, only replacing *bhagvā* dress with *jog*. While this does not mean that the two are the same, it does necessarily relate the two. Perhaps the grammatical rule, of adding an “ī” to the end of an abstract noun and thereby creating a word to describe a person who engages in the action of the abstract noun, may continue to ring true. Hence, if a Yogī is someone who does *yog*, and a Jogī is here stating that he and his community are compelled to adopt *jog*, then perhaps “Jogī” can sometimes refer to a Yogī and sometimes to a non-Yogī, whose socioeconomic identity is somehow ascetic. In the second instance, *jog* can refer to an abstract noun, “ascetic-identity.” Even if

this statement is true only in the case of Mahbūbnāth's interview, we now have a new vocabulary for ascetic begging: Kalbeliyas are compelled, because of the curse of their Guru, to perform their ascetic identity, part of which meant – at some historical point – dressing and begging as ascetics.

This brings us back to the centrality of sartorial and bodily practice in the performance of *jog*, of ascetic identity (See Illustration 9). Bansīnāth's and Mahbūbnāth's memories of begging share two important emphases: ascetic identity and the material environment in which it is performed. The ascetic identity, described as inherited from Guru Kanipāvjī, in part entails the wearing of *bhagvā*, or ochre-colored clothes of ascetics. D. Gold (1999:73) claims that the ochre-colored *kurtā* and white *dhotī* of another caste of Nāth Jogīs in Rajasthan underscores their membership in a, agriculturalist, "peasant world," and their "Nath sectarian identity." While this sartorial practice is certainly an identity marker for Kalbeliyas, it is also a strategy of ritualization, deployed during certain begging practices.

Having addressed Mahbūbnāth's representations of ascetic begging, let us turn to those of his mother, Śānti Devī Pāvār, who was a centrally significant teacher and initiator of Mahbūbnāth in his begging career. After considering Śānti Devī's interview here, in which the woman of the household is predominantly responsible for the family's earnings, we will end this section of the chapter with an interview with Kālūnāth Aṭhvāl, in which he also remembers his mother as the predominant economic supporter of his family. Differing from men's method of begging and self-representation, Kalbeliya women do not dress up as *sādhvīs* (female ascetics) when they beg. Even still, they begin in the name of goddesses and gods, and therefore I will read this interview attuned to its connections with and relevance for a discussion of ascetic-begging. Both of these women, as well as most other women I knew to be



Illustration 9. Group of Kalbeliya ascetic-beggars at Kalbeliya wedding. Photo by Carter Higgins.

beggars, begged predominantly by two methods: showing the stone image of the Seven Sisters, and showing five-, six-, and seven-legged cows.

When we last heard from Śānti Devī, I argued that she continually alluded to her dissatisfaction with the past specifically because of her inability to receive help in taking care of her family. Here, too, Śānti Devī begins with another discussion her solitude in responsibility.

Śānti Devī Paṃvār: Before, my husband ... earned nothing. He still earns nothing and before he earned nothing. I gave birth to my son and not even three days later I was going out [to beg] in the village. And what did my husband do? He abandoned me while I hungry; he went out.

Yasmine Singh: Where did he go?

ŚP: He went somewhere or another. I asked him where he went for those fifteen days.

He did not care for me well; he did not bring me any food. He kept me distressed. So what did I do with that child? I went into the village with the stone [image of the Seven Sisters]. So then, the child couldn't stay in my lap and I became exhausted. Sister, the boy was shitting. I was standing, with all of my attention tied up in begging, and the child was shitting. So I cleaned it up and then started back begging ...

We begged at Galtājī. The boys and girls begged there too. The whole family went there to beg ... My youngest son was born at Galtājī. He was born while we were begging. They put me to sleep there in the bushes – they laid bedding out there and put me to sleep. Then, after knocking me over like that, they went back to begging.

YS: Then you went right back to work too?

ŚP: Then I also went back out begging. I didn't sleep for four days after the births of my children. I was really hurting. I was really troubled, so how could I sleep? I will only eat if I go out. If I don't go then I will starve to death. So I went; I went back out in less than one day ...

Quite a lot of people lived [at Galtājī]; a bunch of people lived there. In one month at least a thousand people lived there. Thousands of people [presumably pilgrims] use to come there and there was *dharm* in many of them. They gave everything: flour, clothing, money, food. They entered there for *dharm*. Each one of received fifteen sacks of grain each.

YS: They gave you that much?

ŚP: Yes. There was grain, peanuts, clothes – which were new and really nice. Meaning, we received everything, and a lot of it. Look around, it is evident in a lot of things – everything in this house was received as alms from someone. From there, we rent a vehicle, pack it with our stuff, bring it here, and then we eat.

YS: You don't sell it?

ŚP: We sell millet, but we keep wheat. We make these shawls out of the cloth ... We make *gudṛṣ* (a colorful type of quilt made by Kalbeliya women and stuffed with old rags). Sister, we even give them to some people. If someone else is poor and doesn't have them, then we give to them. Some people live outside [of Jaipur], right? Those poor souls never have the means to survive. They live the same way we used to live. So we also give [goods acquired at Galtājī] to them. We give to their children, to their older members and younger members. We never had anything before, just like they don't have anything now. We used to be very troubled. We begged; we only ate when we begged from door to door to door.

YS: Did you beg from door to door before Galtājī or after?

ŚP: I begged door to door before Galtājī. I still beg now.

YS: You still go out begging?

ŚP: Yes, I still beg. But I have less courage these days. Even with less courage I beg with the snake. I show the snake.

YS: Women take the snakes when they go?

ŚP: Yes, women take snakes.

YS: Do you also go like this?

ŚP: I also go. I still take snakes.

YS: Do you play the *bīn*?

ŚP: I don't play the *bīn*, but I do take the snake out when I go. I say things like this:
“This is the *nāg* of Śaṅkar, give it money for milk. Bholenāth will cause your success. Serve Śaṅkar, serve Śaṅkar.” So, they give me one, two, or five rupees for milk. When they give money to the snake, I feed it milk and I feed my children.

This portion of the interview jumps around a bit, but it does so between a few extremely helpful illustrations. Śānti Devī starts this section off with a discussion of her memories of giving birth to her children amidst begging responsibilities, which she elaborates after introducing us to her time at Galtājī. An important temple site just outside Jaipur, Galtājī is visited throughout the year by pilgrims who bathe in the

pools filled by the self-appearing (*svayambhū*) stream.⁶⁰ A large festival is held at Galtāji for the entire month of Kārtik, during which nearly all of the Kalbeliyas from Jaipur and the surrounding villages camp and beg there. Śānti Devī and her family, after wandering around, lived at Galtāji for a number of years, where they earned money by begging from pilgrims, officiating the worship of their five-legged cow, and allowing foreigners to take their pictures. From begging and childbirth at Galtāji, Śānti Devī moves on to discuss the nature of alms generally received at Galtāji. Finally, Śānti Devī elaborates on women's begging practices (see Illustration 10).

In the beginning of my fieldwork, men generally told me that women do not beg. Once people started admitting to me that women do, in fact, beg, they continued to assure me that women do not beg with snakes. Robertson (1996: 101-03), too, had been told that Kalbeliya men in eastern Rajasthan (including Jaipur) and Delhi do not allow their women to beg. The confusion may arise from the fact that Kalbeliyas from all over Rajasthan, with different memories of begging strategies and constraints, all live together now in Kalākār Colony in Jaipur. Still, some older Kalbeliya women living in the villages around Jaipur beg with images of the goddesses and extra-limbed cows. For her part, Śānti Devī has fleshed out in her interview what begging has meant in her context. Her illustration points to both the hardships and profitability of begging.

After we conducted this interview with Śānti Devī, Yasmine Singh and I were invited across the street, to have dinner with Kālūnāth Aṭhvāl and his family. Both Yasmine and I were interested in Śānti Devī's self-representation as chief economic supporter of the household, and proceeded to discuss this at dinner. Kālūnāth, who was also present during the interview with Śānti Devī, remembered that his mother too used to beg everyday, both with a stone image of the Seven Sisters and with a six-

⁶⁰ For more on Kalbeliya begging and living practices at Galtāji, see Robertson (1996: 114-15).



Illustration 10. Śānti Devī Paṃvār, sewing a *gūdrī* (quilt). Photo by Yasmine Singh.

legged cow. As he began to talk about his mother, I asked Kālūnāth if I could record his words, and he obliged. The following is an excerpt from that recording.

Kālūnāth Aṭhvāl: My mother and father were very poor before. My father wandered around the villages. They could no longer live off of his earnings, after having two or three children. So my mother went into the villages with a basket, which we call *chābrī*. We spread cloth in the inside of the basket and then, on top of that, lay stone *mūrtīs* (images) of our seven mothers. Having placed that in there, [my mother] took that and went into the villages to beg. She used to go

door to door. If there was a really big village, then she would spend the whole day there, from morning until evening, and bring home ten or twenty kilograms of grain. She would also go beg and bring home [grain] from *dhāṇṣ* (village neighborhoods, often caste exclusive), comprised of really small houses: like, two houses here, five houses ahead, and two houses ahead of that. Working like that, slowly – we used to live in the village, before – they begged two days here, five days ahead, ten days ahead of that. Then, we grew up and started living permanently in our village. People built houses and things in the village. After that, my mother took the *chābrī* and begged; and my father had a six-legged cow. He took that and went begging, from village to village and house to house. But he brought home less grain because he wandered around less; my mother wandered around more, so she brought home more. Things went slowly like this and we grew up.

My parents put us in school. Out of five brothers, they left three of us in school. In order to educate us, they saw to our admissions. There was a government school in the village and I studied there for four or five years. Then, suddenly and out of nowhere, my mother became paralyzed and one side of her body became disabled.

Then, after that, only my father wandered around, begging with his cow. He was not able to cover the school and household expenses with the money from that. Then he said, “Brother, I no longer have the means to educate you in school.” So I studied for four or five years and then quit school ...

Both my mother and father would come here to Jaipur and stay for ten days or something. They usually received flour in Jaipur. They came to the city to wander around in the neighborhood alleys. They would collect enough flour

for ten days; they would bring back forty or fifty kilograms of flour; they also received some money, like one or two hundred rupees. They would take that forty or fifty kilograms of flour and stay in Jaipur for ten or fifteen days. Then they came back to the village. They would give us all a ration of that food and stay in the village for four days, and then return to Jaipur ... [After she became paralyzed,] my mother stayed here and my father came back to give us the goods. He would stay with us for one or two days and then return to Jaipur ...

Then we came to Jaipur too, when I was fifteen or sixteen years old. My brother was married two days after coming to Jaipur. Everyone started living separately after he was married. Then, two of us brothers and my mother started living with my father [in Jaipur]. I was not married and I was pretty young, fifteen or sixteen years old. So, after coming here, I started driving a cycle-rickshaw. My mother became paralyzed, so she was taking medicine and only my father went out [to earn].

The economic practices of Kālūnāth's parents and his wife Jānkī Devī's parents present illustrative comparisons.⁶¹ Kālūnāth, his sister, and the four younger brothers stayed in their house in Bobas, their village, where they were essentially raised by their oldest brother, Kāmaṇāth, and his wife. Their parents wandered around together, bringing grain and begged goods home to the children periodically, but Kālūnāth's

⁶¹ The examples of parents of both Kālūnāth and Jānkī Devī will be returned to several times in the course of the thesis. Although Kālūnāth's parents were deceased at the time of the fieldwork for this paper, I spent more time with Kālūnāth than I did with anyone else, and hence collected a good deal of information about him. Jānkī Devī's parents, on the other hand, and live with the families of their sons in a village named Premnagar, which is an hour rickshaw ride outside of Jaipur. I traveled to Premnagar with Kālūnāth and Jānkī several times and interacted with several members of Jānkī Devī's family in Jaipur and other villages, on several occasions.

mother was, as long as she was healthy, the major bread-winner. When she fell ill and could no longer beg, Kālūnāth's father did go out and beg alone, but his earnings were significantly less than his wife's had been, and he could no longer afford to send their children to school. Jānkī Devī's parents were, and are, also semi-nomadic, wandering around begging, while the children stayed at home. In their case, however, it is Jānkī Devī's father, Badrīnāth Paṃvār, who is the family's main earner.

What do these memories of Kalbeliya female begging with multi-extra-limbed cows (see illustration 11) and stone images of the Seven Mothers have to do with those of the Kalbeliya male ascetic-beggar? How are the two related, and what does this relation tell us about remembered Kalbeliya begging services? To begin, the relation between the two methods of begging may be characterized by their relation of alterity. While men dress as sādhus and perform their identity as bābās, both while showing snakes and while begging as ascetics, women do not perform their ascetic identities when they beg. However, the accoutrements of female begging are nonetheless potent ritual materials: images of the goddesses, extra-limbed cows worthy of *pūjā* ("worship"), and even snakes. Furthermore, Śānti Devī's example of what she might say when she begs resembles very nearly the excerpt given in the opening of this section, of Savāīnāth, dressed as an ascetic and showing snakes to pilgrims at the Bālājī temple in Chomūṃ. Additionally, Kalbeliya men and women are remembered as having begged in similar places: in neighborhood villages, at temples and during temple festivals (*melā*), and occasionally in the city. All of these structural similarities seem to suggest that the relationship between male and female ritualized begging is one of alterity exactly because both forms utilize strategies of ritualization in order to differentiate these actions from others. Ergo, one can understand the quote from Komal Kothari, with which this chapter began, as an indication of the success of these strategies: the Kalbeliya snake-charmer is distinct



Illustration 11. Kalbeliya cow with two extra legs and tongue. Photo by Carter Higgins.

from the beggars on the street precisely because his actions are, to a certain extent, aimed at creating this difference.

Ritualization, however, is not the only strategy remembered to have been used by Kalbeliya beggars; they also entertained audiences. With this illustration of the multiple memories of Kalbeliya ritualized begging, we now turn to those memories of Kalbeliyas as entertainers.

Services in the Village – Entertainment

This paper started with Komal Kothari's assertion that Kalbeliya snake-charmers were not, in fact, entertainers, that their role in the fabric of Rajasthani rural life is best described in its fulfillment of certain ritual services. This statement, however, contradicts statements made by my informants, which point to a remembered

connection between the itinerant Kalbeliyas of the past as begging as ascetics and other ritual specialists, showing snakes, and also entertaining patrons with their music and dance. If the presentation of these memories attempts to clarify the nature of remembered socioeconomic practices of itinerant Kalbeliyas, it also seeks to confront the image promoted in modern Kalbeliya “Dance Party” performances, which are often marketed as “traditional” Rajasthani dance.⁶² The form of dance known as “Kalbeliya,” performed in numerous “Kalbeliya Dance Parties” at tourist hotels, weddings, parties, and “cultural festivals” in Rajasthan, greater India, and abroad, is remembered as a recently formed phenomenon. Although I do not here pursue the recent history of the creation of a Kalbeliya “Dance Parties” (see Illustration 12), which in itself deserves to stand as the subject of a detailed intellectual enquiry, the interviews adduced in this section are taken from a body of my interviews in which I was primarily concerned with this history. In the course of conducting these interviews, I discovered that those practices, which constitute for many Kalbeliyas the pre-history of the Kalbeliya Dance Party, afford a richer sense of the remembered practices of itinerant Kalbeliyas.

I open this section with an interview with Banvārīnāth Paṃvār, who was a musician in the first Dance Party to travel to and perform in the United States. I

⁶² This is not an attempt to thwart the Kalbeliya efforts in the tourist industry; it is an attempt to clarify the nature of the begging practices of Kalbeliya memories. I must here make two remarks. First, most Kalbeliyas would probably tell tourists their dance is not, in fact, traditional, were it not for the language barrier. The major difference most Kalbeliyas presumed between me – a white foreigner, referred to frequently by the same adjectives used for tourists – and other travelers in India, was my knowledge of Hindi, and perhaps also my intrusive curiosity about the affairs of their caste community. There is no reason to assume that these people would freely tell me of the dance’s recent history, while lying to all others. Secondly, as this is a Master Thesis, and will hence most likely have a limited scholarly readership, my exploration into the nature of Kalbeliya practices will not have a wide enough exposure to affect tourist conceptions of the Kalbeliya dance!



Illustration 12. Author with the Rājki-Pūraṇ Nāth Saperā Dance Party at the Surajkund Festival.

Photo by Yasmine Singh.

conducted this interview with Banvārīnāth in front of his house in Kalākār Colony, with the help of Kālūnāth Aṭhvāl and Yasmine Singh.

Banvārīnāth Paṃvār: The *ḍaphlī* is small, like [imitating the sound of the *ḍaphlī*] *ṭamāṭam, ṭamāṭam, ṭamāṭam, ṭamāṭam*. The public used to dance as well [during our performances]; they would move like their feet like this, further and further.

Yasmine Singh: You all danced before? Or you didn't dance?

BP: We danced ... in weddings.

Kālūnāth Athvāl: We danced in weddings. It wasn't a traveling occupation.

BP: This progam –

KA: This program line didn't exist.

BP: We only danced in our weddings, no where else.

YS: No where else? Only in weddings?

KA: Well, men used to wander around the village, begging with their *ḍaphlīs* and *bīns* and showing snakes.

BP: They sang songs while doing this.

KA: Men sang songs.

BP: Only men danced.

KA: Only men danced. They went into the village to make their rounds [begging]. They would take flour, wheat, and other things. During the entire day they received two to five rupees; in that way ten rupees, five rupees, two rupees. In that time its like five people would give alms and five to ten rupees were hard to come by.

This interview is a helpful transition between the practices of ascetic-begging and entertaining, because the two are differentiated and connected in various ways. For example, in the beginning of the interview, Banvārīnāth's statement regarding the voice of the *ḍaphlī* and the involvement of the "public" is a description of entertainment performances. Following Yasmine's question,⁶³ however, Banvārīnāth and Kālūnāth proceeded to differentiate Kalbeliya dance at their own weddings from the prevalent occupation of performing in Dance Parties. Moving from this point, however, Kālūnāth and Banvārīnāth present a third type of dance, different from both wedding dance (see Illustration 13) and Dance Parties. This dance was performed by itinerant Kalbeliyas who also begged as ascetics and with snakes.

Building on Banvārīnāth's account, I present an interview conducted with Banānāth Cauhāṇ at a dinner given in honor of the ensuing wedding of the two sons of Gulābo Saperā, the most famous Kalbeliya dancer.

Banānāth Cauhāṇ: In the beginning the *saperā* community, the *nāth* community, consisted of Nāths – the Nine Nāths. There were nine Nāths, all of different types. Among these what happened was that everyone became engaged in their own individual work (*kām*), their own meritorious action (*karm*). Each Nāth began their own meritorious action, which was specific to each Nāth ... So in the beginning, we lived in the *jaṅgal*, setting up our camps (*ḍerā*) from village to

⁶³ The following question, asked by Yasmine, was an attempt to clarify the nature of dance in practices of itinerant Kalbeliyas. We had been conducting interviews with Kalbeliyas, and with Naṭṣ-Kaṭhpūtī-vālās and Rāṇā-Ḍholīs, members of other formerly itinerant performance castes who lived in Kalākār Colony and similar settlements. Many individuals had told us that "Kalbeliya dance" did not exist twenty or thirty years earlier; the dance and the industry of Kalbeliya Dance Parties began with the now famous Gulābo Saperā, and her partnership with the Rajasthan State Government's Department of Tourism. Hence, whenever Kalbeliyas mentioned dance in their representations of the past, our interview strategy was to ask about the nature of the dance.



Illustration 13. Kalbeliya women dancing at a wedding. Photo by Carter Higgins.

village – sometimes here today, there tomorrow, over there the day after. Now, our work was this begging as livelihood (*māṃgne khāne kā kām*). Before, we also used to build grindstones – for grinding flour – which is called *gaṭṭī* in Marvari. And then we also used to make small round pots; that was our familial work. Then again, this begging as livelihood is also family work. For example, suppose that we went out into a village – we filled our bellies with grain and wheat. We went into the forests, and then we hunted. Hunting rabbits and other animals we made curries (*sabzi*) and ate. In the beginning, our familial occupation in Marvar was begging as livelihood. Later what happened was that our men went [for work] whenever our great kings (*rājā-mahārājā*) sponsored any *mahfil* (“assembly

including entertainment and dancing”) or other such event. Taking one *bīn* – one *pūṅgī* – one *khañjarī*, and one *tūmbā*⁶⁴ those men danced; those men worked.

CH: Men danced?

BC: Men danced, boys danced, after dressing up as women (ladies *bankarke*). And men played the *bīn*, the *tūmbā*, and sang old songs, such as “Pūniyārī,” “Jilāvā,” and songs of many other types. They sang this type of really wonderful old songs. So, [the kings] called on [our men] for this reason; [our men] sang there. There they gave us some rewards and the like; we brought those gifts home. They fed us a lot of liquor and meat. So they became happy. Brother, they became happy because of singing and dancing. We played old songs like “Māv,” “Ḍoṇī,” “Momal,” “Panyārī,” etc. When we played music for the Rajputs in this way, they became happy. Whatever they gave [to us], they did so out of happiness. And we brought that home.

In this interview, Banānāth succinctly introduces many of the aspects of Kalbeliya memories of itinerancy which other informants of mine elaborated elsewhere. For example, before anything else, Banānāth introduces the Nine Nāths,⁶⁵ comprised of individuals working in their own, separate areas, yet somehow connected to one

⁶⁴ *Tūmbā* is the alternate pronunciation/spelling for *tumbā*. The *tumbā* is a percussion instrument made from a hollowed out gourd, with a drum head on the bottom opening. A long string is attached to the instrument through a hole in the drum head, then extended through the gourd and in the hand of the musician. The gourd is held between the elbow and the side of the musician’s torso. When plucked with the musician’s other hand, the *tumbā* makes a percussive sound, the pitch of which is manipulated by loosening or tightening the long string with the extended hand.

⁶⁵ For a historical discussion of the Nine Nāths, see White (1996: 90-100).

another. Among this group of Nāths, the Kalbeliyas were “engaged in their own individual work, in their own meritorious action,” which consisted of setting up tents in the *jaṅgal*, begging, hunting, and making either grindstones or clay pots. One ought to note, however, there are a few, idiosyncratic aspects of Banānāth’s account as well. For example, snakes are nowhere mentioned in this brief sketch of the past. After quickly referring to the itinerant lifestyle, Banānāth moves on to those remembered aspects of itinerancy which most likely interest him. As a resident of Kalākār Colony and a director of a dance program, Banānāth is understandably preoccupied with entertainment, and provides us with an interesting characterization of Kalbeliyas as royal patrons and entertainers. I did not generally hear Kalbeliyas refer to their ancestors in such a manner.

The other aspect of Banānāth’s comments interesting and relevant here is his statement that wandering Kalbeliya performers played the *bīn*, *kañjīrī*, and *tumbā*, all famously associated with Saṃperās, while a man dressed as a woman, not a woman, danced. Despite the fact that Kalbeliyas are increasingly known for their Dance Party performances, in which women figure as the main dancers, the men are remembered as the dancers in earlier time. While men in Jaipur now dance and facilitate the use of props for the more centrally important female dancers in Kalbeliya Dance Parties, they wear the male costume of the Bañjārā-Bañjārī dance. At no point during my fieldwork in Jaipur did I see a Kalbeliya man performing a dance while wearing the clothes of a woman.⁶⁶ This practice has apparently lost significance among Kalbeliyas in Jaipur.

⁶⁶ I did, however, see male Kalbeliya dancers dressed as women in two other locations. First, I saw such a Kalbeliya man dancing to the music of a *bīn*, *ḍaphlī*, and *tumbā* for a substantial audience in Gogāmeṛī village, in Hanumangarh District, northern Rajasthan, during the pilgrimage/festival/fair in celebration of Gogānaumī. Secondly, I witnessed the dance of several such men in celebration of a Kalbeliya wedding in Bhairvāī village, Ajmer District.

Having seen the role of men in remembered entertainment practices of itinerant Kalbeliyas, we continue with Banānāth's interview to examine the role of women in different entertainment practices.

Banānāth Cauhāṇ: So after this – ages later – in Marvar, our girls danced during auspicious (*pāvan*) times. They started dancing. There is the *caṅg* instrument, which we call the *gahrā* [in Marvari].

CH: Yeah, the big *caṅg*.

BC: The big *caṅg* ... So this auspicious time comes only during the time of Holī. So in Pāvan, they took that *caṅg*, which is like a flat metal plate. The [now famously black colored] Kalbeliya dress did not used to be black. The black dress is not our original familial (*khāndānī*) dress. For example, before they wore a long cloth and ladies wore long shirts. There was the *bhagvā* (ochre-colored cloth worn by ascetics), decorated with hand embroidery (Rajasthani: *kasīdā*) and glass seeds⁶⁷ – all of which were worn in Marvar. In Marvar, Mewar, and Kherad, there were as many women's shawls (Rajasthani: *lūgrī*) as there were long shirts. Everything was sewn by hand. In the month of Phāgan, five to seven men and five or six men, taking the *caṅg* and flat metal plate, went into the villages. They received money in villages and in cities. They had the girls dance and they sang. They created an uproar: some people gave them money, some gave flour, some gave four *ānās* (or four sixteenths of an Indian rupee),

⁶⁷ The word I have here translated as “seed,” *bīre*, is not listed in McGregor's (1993) Hindi dictionary. Sakriya's (1984) Rajasthani- Hindi dictionary defines *bīro* as “*kṣup*,” “*paudhā*,” “*būjo*,” and “*bīro*,” all of which, in either Rajasthani or Hindi, refer either to seeds or to small plants.

some gave five rupees, some gave ten rupees. In doing so, we would return home in the evening after begging. We would divide however much we had acquired among however many people had gone. We received flour, money, and cloth, and however many people went, we divided it among them – completely equally.

Above, Banvārīnāth Paṃvār and Kālūnāth Aṭhvāl described three kinds of Kalbeliya dances: the Kalbeliya man who dressed as a woman and danced amidst itinerant services; dancing in celebration of marriages at Kalbeliya weddings; and Kalbeliya Dance Parties, a now popular occupation in urban Rajasthan. Banānāth has here indicated a forth form of dance, which is connected yet distinct from these other forms. Because the moral legitimacy of girls' and women's involvement in contemporary Kalbeliya Dance Parties is a heavily contested battleground for Kalbeliyas in Rajasthan,⁶⁸ many of the representations of the past of Kalbeliya entertainment practices invoke the image of dancing-as-begging during the month of Phāgan.⁶⁹ More important for this chapter, however, is the time of these practices: during an important month of the Hindu ritual calendar. Just as individuals who beg may utilize strategies of ritualization and entertainment more or less in certain contexts, so this practice, too, may combine both strategies.

While Banānāth described the dancing and begging practices of girls during the month of Phāgan without reference to the other, previously mentioned forms of dance, this separation is not maintained in all accounts. An example of the relations

⁶⁸ I must reiterate my claim that the recent history of Kalbeliya Dance Parties is an area which needs further examination. The contestations over this occupation are the site of heated debates over assertions of sexual (im)morality and social advancement.

⁶⁹ Alternatively pronounced Phāgun.

between dancing-begging and dancing in weddings is underscored in the following interview with Mevā Ḍaglā, conducted by Yasmine Singh (although I was present for the portion presented below). Mevā was the original singer in the initiatory Kalbeliya Dance Party. As Kalbeliyas often recounted, Gulābo danced and Mevā sang.

Mevā Ḍaglā: This dance started only from our *paramparā*. We have weddings, right?

When our girls are very young – very young girls dance in weddings, and in some *melās* in the village, if there are any. For example, we have a festival is Phāgun, which comes after Holī. So, a lot of our girls dance to the tune of the *caṅg* on these days in Phāgun.

Yasmine Singh: To the tune of the *caṅg*?

MD: To the tune of the *caṅg*. For example, we dance in the markets and in the neighborhoods. So, this is our *paramparā*, from the beginning.

YS: Did you take money for dancing, or did you dance for the heck of it?

MD: No. We took money, right?

YS: You took money before too?

MD: We used to show our snakes and *pūṅgṣ*. But the government stopped that. This was a hobby of the girls from childhood; they went happily.

Apparently the dances performed during Holī and in weddings were similar enough that Mevā remembers them as the same “hobby” of Kalbeliya girls. They are both described as a long-standing “tradition” (*paramparā*) of Kalbeliyas, dating to the “beginning,” and as an economic recourse to the financial loss experienced following the governmental efforts to stop snake-charming, which violates the Wildlife Act of 1972. So while women’s dance practices are an integral part of a Kalbeliya past, they are also a helpful weapon in fighting contemporary financial battles.

Telling a more detailed narrative of Kalbeliya entertainment practices, Pūraṇnāth Ḍaglā attributes the dance during Holī to a particular sub-group in the Kalbeliya community.

Pūraṇnāth Ḍaglā: [From among out Kalbeliya community,] there are people who weave baskets (*chabrī*) ... You tear bamboo and then you take oil – We have three *jātīs* among the Jogīs. The first one (basket-weavers) keeps “Jogī” as a name. My wife’s family keeps the name “Jogī.” They don’t keep the name “Nāth” very much; they keep the name “Rām,” like Baṅgārām, Hallārām [as opposed to Baṅgānāth, etc.]. They have moved here and started to take the name “Nāth.” [My wife] had two brothers who came here to Jaipur in ’75 or ’80 – they came around 1980, from the district of Pālī [Marvar].

So the people who do this work... do honest work. My father-in-law [who does this,] is seventy years old but he still makes them. And we who work with snakes and *bīns* are also honest. We never steal or do anything like that...Brother, there are three *jātīs* in our community, in the Kalbeliya family. You need to take note of this fact. In the Bali Pharna – Pali districts, those who make baskets take the name Jogī. Then there is one *jāti* who makes *cakkīs* and

sells them to people – that was what people used to use to grind flour. They used to grind in their houses, now they do it with a machine ...

CH: Were there dancers in all three *jātīs*?

PD: No, no. Listen. How did this dance come about? Those that make the *cakkā* used to keep *caṅgs*. So, Holī is coming in Phāgun, which is one of our months. During that month, they would go out into the neighborhoods with a *caṅg*. They didn't have *bīṃs* because they don't play them. So, they had a *ḍaphlī* and a metal plate – a small one, made out of brass or copper – which they would strike with a wooden stick – *ṭhan ṭhan ṭhan ṭhan*. They would sing and have the girls dance. But their dress, their uniform was simple and ordinary, like they always wear. There was some hand embroidery. They danced like that, while singing. After watching them, after seeing some art, the people from the neighborhood would give them a little something. That's how it was.

This excerpt from one of my interviews with Pūraṇnāth introduces a question which does not figure much into my overall argument, but which is nonetheless an important aspect of certain memories of Kalbeliya social life – the division of the Kalbeliya caste-community into three sub-communities: the Sāmp-Vālās, or those who work with snakes; the Cakkī-Vālās, or those who make baskets; and the Chabṛī-Vālās, those who make grindstones for spices.⁷⁰ By bracketing these Holī begging practices under the

⁷⁰ See Robertson (1998: 12-13). The reason I have focused on this tripartite distinction is that it was seldom mentioned by my informants. Certain changes in the occupational practices of Kalbeliyas in Jaipur seem to have normalized these differences. Very few people in each of the three categories practice their distinctive trades. Additionally, As Pūraṇnāth stated, most of the Kalbeliya men in Jaipur, despite their previous sub-group affiliations, now take the name “Nāth” after their first name.

roles performed by the Cakkī-Vālās, Pūraṇnāth seems to have indicated that a separation between itinerant ascetic-begging and snake-showing is perhaps warranted, at least regarding one sub-community of the Kalbeliyas and the Holī dance. While this may or may not have been the historical case I will never know. As it turns out, I heard of Kalbeliya women and girls dancing and begging from Sāmp-Vālās as well – apparently this has entered their memories of the past as well.

Again, at the end of this chapter as in the last, we return to certain ambivalences regarding remembered methods of begging. Here, these are ambivalences about the entertainment practices of snake-showing Kalbeliyas, at least as far as the begging-dance in the month of Phāgun is concerned. This has arisen due to my use of memory to construct an image of the past practices of Kalbeliyas. This ambivalence, however, is desired because I here attempt to reproduce only those ambivalences which Kalbeliyas themselves debate and contest. Whereas the last chapter saw Kalbeliya past itinerancy as a more stable thematic, this chapter sees a less stable thematic of multiple characteristics.

This section, then, has observed four varieties of Kalbeliya entertainment: music with men dancing, dressed as women; dance in Kalbeliya weddings; Kalbeliya Dance Parties; and dancing to the music of the *caṅg* during the month of Phāgun. While the first and the last of these may resemble what Hayden (1999) had in mind when he coined the term “service nomads,” the middle two are of a different nature. Hence the man dancing, dressed as a woman, and the dance over the *caṅg* in Phāgun are the two forms of entertainment which best compliment this chapter’s emphasis on remembered Kalbeliya begging practice. Yet, dancing in weddings and Kalbeliya Dance Parties may not be easily discarded, because they ostensibly draw from the same repertoire of bodily memory as do the others. Ergo, we return to the issue of strategy in relation to time and space as crucial to remembered Kalbeliya social

practice. Unfortunately, to pursue this point further I would have to travel back into time to examine and compare the bodily movements of agents engaged in all four categories of practice. As this poses an impossibility, I will merely close this section with the conjecture that the four systems of dance may have seen some overlap.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to characterize the two main aspects of remembered Kalbeliya begging practice – the strategies of ritualization and entertainment. Following Hayden’s characterization of “service nomads” (1999; 11-12), these practices probably provided services to villagers which they desired, and in return for which they reimbursed the Kalbeliyas. However, we now see that Kalbeliyas frequently discuss their practices as begging (*māṃgnā*) or begging for alms (*bhikh/bhikṣā*), and hence generally resist explaining these actions as exchanged. Like Robertson (1999; 95), I too found that Kalbeliyas invoked their poverty and need in conjunction with representations of begging. Indeed, Kalbeliyas customarily claimed the trope “we are poor people” (*ham garīb ādmī haiṃ*) as explication for many actions and conditions. However, the male Kalbeliya social practice of ascetic-begging is tied directly to the ascetic identity of the Kalbeliya caste-community, and the form of ritualized female begging identifies them with Rajasthani women of similar caste- and class-statuses. Both these means of begging rely on a skilled engagement of their bodies with the surrounding material environment. In fact, both ritualized and entertaining forms of practice can be viewed as instances of “skilled practice,” and hence incorporating and enacting “bodily memory.” But this anticipates the next chapter.

The final product of this endeavor to present excerpts from my interviews with Kalbeliyas living in and around Jaipur is hopefully a “thick” illustration of multiple

memories and interested representations of the past. From this emerges an understanding of the multiple remembered ways of being a Kalbeliya, the most salient of which are related to the socioeconomic practices of ritualized begging, showing-snakes, and entertaining, which may, more or less – depending on the situation – employ strategies of ritualization. While the previous chapter approached these memories and representations as forming a repertoire of themes from the past, used to voice various arguments in the Kalbeliya discursive formation of the past, present, and future of the caste-community, this chapter has sought to work out, more fully, the characteristics of this repertoire. Following Novetzke (2008; 16-17), I propose that these repertoirical themes may be understood as “texts” which circulate among Kalbeliyas in and around Jaipur, allowing for an “imagining” of the Kalbeliya caste-community. Hence, they are, in a sense, constructive of community identities and, in Kalbeliyas’ selective choices as to what from the repertoire to emphasize and deemphasize in their representations of the past, constructive of personal identities.

CHAPTER 5

THE BUSINESS TODAY OF YESTERDAY: NEW ORIENTALIST PASTS

Introduction

Jeffrey G. Snodgrass's work on Bhāṭs – bardic, puppeteering communities in Rajasthan – has underscored the importance of the tourism industry in the Bhāṭ's reformulation of their socioeconomic identities, and their new engagements with shifting fields of power (2006). In a context where historical exoticism exemplifies tourist desires, Bhāṭs are reformulating their community, representing themselves as other to modernity, and hence “claiming to be curators of Rajasthani tradition and thus authoritative speakers for their state's past” (2006: 9, 22, 169). Similarly, a recent volume edited by Henderson and Weisgrau (2007) entitled *Raj Rhapsodies: Tourism, Heritage and the Seduction of History* has attempted to breathe new theoretical and historical/ethnographic life into the academic study of tourism in Rajasthan. This move was largely inspired by emerging tourist practices on the ground in Rajasthan, which, beginning in the 1990s, propelled the state of Rajasthan towards its current status as the premier tourist destination in India.

In the forward to this volume, Edensor claims that the collected papers all attempt to work with three fundamental conceptions of tourism in Rajasthan (Henderson and Weisgrau 2007: xvi-xix). First, the tourism industry in Rajasthan relies on and reproduces “Orientalist imagery of India,” which combines assumptions of the moral and civilizational superiority of the “West” with “fantasies about romance, decadence, sensuality, cruelty, sex and the unfathomable” (xvii). Secondly, these papers seek to describe the roles played by the tourism industry in various changes in local power relations; apparently, claims Edensor, there are “winners and losers” in these struggles for power in the tourism industry (xviii). Finally, these

collected chapters are attempts to describe the multiple and changing methods used by those working in the tourism industry to “(re)present themselves, wield political influence, acquire status, make money and shape tourist space” (xix). Henderson’s and Weisgrau’s introduction is equally helpful in thinking about these practices (2007: xxv-xlvi). Approaching tourism in Rajasthan, which represents the state as “the most heritage-laden, traditional, and authentic of India’s states,” these authors claim that the papers in this volume address a set of questions:

What different messages are sent through the medium of tourist encounter? How do these messages confirm dominant images of India, and in what ways do they mute or render invisible alternative versions? What is the role of history, colonial domination, and Orientalist discourse on the figuring of contemporary tourism? How does the allocation of spaces for tourism represent local conflicts and struggle over resources? How do existing forms of identity, hierarchy and domination play out in the newer struggles over tourism resources? (Henderson and Weisgrau 2007: xxvii)

To these questions, however, I add that of Chakrabarty’s “conjoined genealogies” (2000: 20). In his attempts to historicize and “provincialize” European categories of society and modernity, Chakrabarty seeks the originality and difference of Indian modernity, observable most clearly in social practices and modes of being which draw simultaneously from Indian and translated and transformed European genealogies. For the present chapter, I will use Chakrabarty’s idea of “conjoined genealogies” to explore the ways in which Kalbeliyas draw from “conjoined repertoires” of meaning production: both from a local, Kalbeliya “public culture” – imagined in ways similar to those described in chapters three and four – and from meaning production in a global capitalist tourism industry. Using these questions to help direct it, this chapter is

primarily interested in the Kalbeliya practice of showing snakes to tourists in front of the City and Wind Palaces, the center of Jaipur's old city, during the period of fieldwork for this thesis, i.e. from the winter of 2008-2009 through the summer of 2009. In accounting for this practice, this paper will argue that snake-charming in the tourism industry needs to be situated in an analytical context which pays attention to its multiple reconfigurations (drawn from a conjoined repertoire) by both socially positioned agency and external constraints –relationships between a Kalbeliya “public culture,” global capitalism, and post-colonial, Orientalist⁷¹ discourses about tourism, Indian-ness, and snake-charming; the Kalbeliya conditions of poverty, low-caste and class status, and lack of education and qualifications for other jobs. Proceeding in such a manner allows this paper to introduce snake-charming as skilled practice, producing new bodily memories in agents, which they in turn deploy in the tourism industry. Such deployment can then be viewed as a socioeconomic strategy, drawing from conjoined repertoires, and placing Kalbeliyas in new micropolitical contestations. From there, I will describe some of these new power-structures in which Kalbeliya snake-charming places actors, as well as the development of new strategies for negotiating these structures. The pursuit of this argument is divided into three sections: a) the major shift in the Kalbeliyas' engagements with the tourist industry, marked by the increased policing of wildlife laws prohibiting snake-charming; b) an ethnographic description of snake-showing practices at City Palace, and an analysis of this description with reference to skilled practice as bodily memory; c) three historicized accounts of power-play at City Palace in which Kalbeliyas maneuver and

⁷¹ If one has doubts about the Orientalist interest in snake-charming, one must only look at the 25th Anniversary Edition of Said's *Orientalism* (1994 [1978]), the cover of which is a painting of a snake-charmer and his child.

negotiate domination and a loose hegemony with the help of a structured and structuring “public culture.”

Shifts in Snake Display to Tourists

Many of my informants who were not showing snakes during the period of my fieldwork remembered doing so previously. These individuals distinguished between two methods of showing snakes: there were those who had showed snakes in the various styles indicated in previous chapters, and there were those who had showed snakes to foreigners in tourist hotels. Robertson’s ethnography attests to such practices; in fact, her sub-section on showing snakes at tourist hotels is the most substantial in her chapter on snake-charming and begging (1998: 119-28). An important point confirmed in my interviews, Robertson claims that those Kalbeliyas who showed snakes in tourist hotels occupied the best economic space. However, during the period of my fieldwork, I found no one who showed snakes at hotels. Indeed, everyone claimed that this practice no longer existed. Apparently between the period of Robertson’s fieldwork, 1987-89, and the period of mine, 2008-09, these venues had come under pressure to stop hosting snake-charmers and other professionals who worked with wild animals.

These pressures were connected to new legal interest in the Wildlife Act of 1972, which criminalized the catching, possessing, and occupational use of wild animals within city boundaries. Since then, various police raids into Saṃperā villages resulted in the arrests of Saṃperās throughout north India. These events have been documented by the Wildlife Trust of India in an effort to negotiate both the preservation of wildlife and the cultural heritage of Saṃperās (Dutt 2004: 12-14). For this project, the Wildlife Trust of India researched and published a manual addressing the social practices of Saṃperās throughout north India, paying particular attention to

their economic conditions and treatments of snakes, perceived shortcomings in current policy dealing with wildlife, and finally proposing a plan for the negotiation between the needs of the snakes and snake-charmers (Dutt 2004: 12-14).

Although the decline in snake-charming, and in showing snakes in tourists hotels deserves a study of its own, this will not be my intention here. Rather, I will present two interviews which indicate two perspectives concerning the reason for this decline, popular among Kalbeliyas. The first of these reasons is the Wildlife Act, while the second – used to explain the decline in snake-charming in general as well – is the decay of interest in snakes. Highlighting the loss of jobs showing snakes in tourist hotels due to the Wildlife Act, I here present an excerpt of an interview taken with Kailāśnāth Derāṇ.

Kailāśnāth Derāṇ: I used to give programs at Clarks Hotel in Amer. I worked daily for two hours there and earned 5,000, 6,000, or 7,000 rupees in those two hours. Customers would come and take pictures of me. I used to put pythons and other snakes around their necks. I would show them monkeys, pythons, cobras, and the like, and make them happy. Then I would take 500 rupees from someone and 1,000 rupees from someone. Before, foreigners, because of their happiness, didn't understand much. I would put out my hand among the customers and money just came; they all gave. I walked around to them and they didn't even see how much they gave me. Some people, according to their own desires, even gave me dollars. That is how the customers were at that time. There are even customers like that now, who give me tips [for driving] without thinking about how much they are giving as a tip. Nowadays there are these types of programs in which an entire [dance] group performs. [The foreigners say] "Brother, how much tip do I need to give to the group, which, all together, resembles a family?" That is how they give.

They don't even take programs like that in villages, like they used to watch my mother and father play the *ḍaphlī* and all. They don't take programs like that in the villages. Therefore, we changed ourselves, [saying] "a man doesn't advance because of these things. I am going to do good things. My children will become educated, will become something, and will progress..."

CH: How is today different from before? You said that [Kalbeliya] people used to learn [about snakes], but now people are afraid and this work [with snakes] is no longer necessary. Why is it no longer necessary?

KD: I will tell you. I used to show snakes outside in the village and in the cities. Whether it was a foreigner from another country or a foreigner from within India, I used to give them my program. Now the people from the Forest Department have placed a ban on forest creatures. So, suppose someone is caught today. They will be sent directly to jail. That person will not receive bail for several years. And whoever has a case will lose two, four, or five *lākh* rupees. You will owe ten times as much you will earn. And, those things on which the government has placed a ban are not good.

Kailāśnāth here indicates a central concern of those who used to make their money showing snakes to foreigners in tourist hotels – arrest. Although stating the argument in his characteristically animated and exaggerated terms, Kailāśnāth brings into light a concern with the Wildlife Act I heard in the course of nearly every interview.

Next, I present a portion with an interview with Pūraṇnāth Ḍaglā of Bhojpurā Bastī in order to highlight some of the broader concerns involved in the decline of snake-showing. Rather than focusing solely on the Wildlife Act or on tourist hotels,

Pūraṇnāth indicates social reasons for this change with regards to the snake in general.

Pūraṇnāth Ḍaglā: The art of the snake is ending because no one wants it. The change of ages has occurred and people do not like the snake; they even hate it a little bit. There are some tourists who have come. We display the snake and *bīn* for them. There is a little *prasād* for them. There are five or ten families who are doing that work. But, everyone can't do that. How can those people who live in the *jaṅgal*, in the village, go in front of *aṅgrez* (literally “English,” but used for all foreigners of non-Asian descent) people for money? Those who do are cunning, like Harjī or Kālū.⁷² There are two or three people who are doing that kind of work. But not everyone can do that. It is the same thing with dance. Pūraṇ is doing it, Rājīkī is doing it, Gulābo is doing it, Sokti is doing it, Mevā is doing it. But not everyone will do it. How will they get money? How will they get money? ... Today this art has no importance. I am saying whole-heartedly that the work of our snake and *bīn* is absolutely useless... The government doesn't want it either; the government has banned it. You want to learn to play the *bīn*, then that can be lawful – but only for [accompanying] the dance. But the government has completely banned the snake. The other thing is that we should learn something else. But for now, for the future, I am not going to do that thing.

⁷² Pūraṇnāth is here referring to Harjīnāth and Kālūnāth Aṭhvāl, whose work at the City Palace will be discussed below. One can see, in this comment, a certain antagonism between these men. This put me in an awkward position for part of the period of my research, as Pūraṇnāth and Kālūnāth were my closest informants and friends.

The major similarity between this explanation, and the one posited by Kailāśnāth, is that they are both reflections on experience. Pūraṇnāth too showed snakes in a tourist hotel. In fact, he showed snakes at Ram Bag Palace, one of the most elegant and expensive palaces-turned-tourist hotels in Jaipur. However, this interview excerpt is important for its differences from that with Kailāśnāth. Without straying too far from the objects of this chapter, I want to underscore that Pūraṇnāth's indication that social, political, and economic reasons combined with the Wildlife Act to create a cultural and historical context in which practices of snake-showing were devalued and marginalized, in both the broader social field, and among Kalbeliyas. Far from the passing of one law alone, the processes which resulted in the decline of snake showing practices are multiple and complicated.

Snake-charming as Skilled Practice and Bodily Memory

Seven Kalbeliya men compose the group of regular snake-charmers who work in front of City Palace, in the old city sector of Jaipur. Harjīnāth, Kālūnāth, Paṭṭūnāth, and Moṛnāth all live in Kalālār Colony in Jaipur; Harjīnāth, paternal cousin of the Harjīnāth and Kālūnāth in Kalākār Colony, lives in the village of Kālvāṛ, twenty kilometers outside of Jaipur; Jadīśnāth and Kailāśnāth live in Bobās village, fifty kilometers outside of Jaipur.⁷³ These men show their snakes in three different sites within the city palace; most of the men revolve around different sites. The place where I spent the most time was inside the City Palace complex, on the street between the

⁷³ Harjīnāth from Kalākār Colony and Harjīnāth from Kālvāṛ are paternal cousins and share the *gort* name Aṭhvāl. Hence, I will distinguish between the two just as anyone who was in the presence of both men might – indicating each by his residence. Hence, I will refer to Harjīnāth Colony-vāle and Harjīnāth Kālvāṛ-vāle.

entrances to City Palace and Jantar Mantar (see Illustration 14).⁷⁴ The other two spots are the private entrance to City Palace, which now features an upscale restaurant, named “The Palace Cafe,” and the Hawa Mahal (“wind palace”), another famous tourist spot and the literal picture-image of Jaipur. The Hawa Mahal and the road between City Palace and Jantar Mantar are locations between which all of these men can travel; the private entrance to the City Palace, however, is like an inner-space of snake-showing, and is a place where Harjīnāth Colony-vāle works, (although Paṭṭūnāth, and to a lesser degree Kālūnāth, work there when Harjīnāth Colony-vāle does not). Because of the placement of the buildings, one may enjoy the shade while sitting in front of the Hawa Mahal only in the morning; otherwise, one must sit in the sun. Hence, those sitting in front of Hawa Mahal relocate to the road between City Palace and Jantar Mantar after around 11:00 am or so.

Kailāśnāth, Jagdīśnāth, and Harjīnāth Kālvār-vāle travel to City Palace most mornings on buses from their respective villages, and Kālūnāth and Paṭṭūnāth take a city bus from Kalākār Colony to City Palace most mornings. Because Harjīnāth Colony-vāle does not generally work in the mornings, Paṭṭūnāth sits in the private entrance until the arrival of the former. The other four men, assuming that they all come, split up into groups of two during the morning, each group showing snakes at either the Hawa Mahal or the road between Jantar Mantar and City Palace. On any given day, however, one or more of the four men will not come into work, for various reasons. Around 11:00 am, when the sun begins to pear over the top of the Hawa Mahal, those who had been showing their snakes there retire to the shade provided by the outer wall of the City Palace, on the sidewalk leading to Jantar Mantar. There, the

⁷⁴ Jantar Mantar is the site of an astronomical look-out built by Savai Jay Singh II (who build Jaipur, relocating the capital of the district from nearby Amer), adjacent to the City Palace, and inside the City Palace complex. This is one of Jaipur’s better-known tourist spots.



Illustration 14. Snake-charming on the road between City Palace and Jantar Mantar.

From left to right: tourist, tourist, Paṭṭūnāth, Kailāśnāth, Kālūnāth, author. Photo by Yasmine Singh.

men sit on newspapers or scraps of cardboard – to guard their bodies from the hot cement – and wait to spot groups of foreign tourists.

One significant component of the skilled practice of showing snakes to tourists is sartorial. In general, the dress of snake-charmers at City Palace resembles that of Kalbeliya ascetic-beggars and male musicians in Kalbeliya Dance Parties – they all dress as ascetics. However, upon closer inspection, all three categories of professional dress are distinguished from the others. Risking a large over-simplification, I might draw a line, indicating cleanliness, brightness of color, and age of the cloth, to begin illustrating an abstraction of these differences. At one extreme of this conjectural line, I could place the Kalbeliya ascetic beggars, who might wear long *kurtās* of colors with yogic implications (red, orange, pink, yellow), a white *dhotī*, and some variety of hats or turbans, all of which might be stained with dirt, tea, and food, and exhibit numerous

burns by *bīṛṣ* and *cillams*.⁷⁵ Their *bīṛs* are carried in long, slender bags, sewn for just such a purpose, which is slung over one shoulder and protected by that hand. These men also carry large cloth sacks, which provide easy transport for food and water, extra clothing, and the large, round bamboo baskets in which the snakes are kept. Popular among Kalbeliya ascetic beggars are worn-out *jūtī*, pointy shoes made from camel-leather, and often embroidered with colorful thread. In addition to this, many Kalbeliya ascetic-beggars wear several plastic, wooden, and *rudrākṣ* beaded necklaces, as well as necklaces with pendants of deities such as Bherūjī, Durgā Mātā, and Rāmdevjī. Most important in terms of jewelry for these men is often their *nād* (a necklace with a small whistle, one or two *rudrākṣ* beads, and a ring) and their *mūdras* (large, thick earrings worn through large holes cut into the cartilage in the middle of the ear). D. Gold (1996: 94-95) has argued that these are indeed two of the most potent physical indicators of one's identification with the Nāth Sampradāy. Yet, there is a difference here. Although many Kalbeliyas did undergo the painful process of having such holes bore through the cartilage in the middle of their ears, particularly in childhood, there are other Kalbeliyas who wear "clip-on" versions of the *mudrā* when they go out begging. Another difference exists in the Kalbeliya explanation of the importance of the *nād*, and in its construction itself. D. Gold's informants claimed that the *nād* is a symbol for a divine sound, and includes a whistle, *one rudrākṣ* bead, a ring, all hung on a black string; this is attested to in Briggs's text as well (D. Gold 1999: 73; see also Briggs 1938: 11-12). Contrarily, I never heard a Kalbeliya talk of a divine sound in conjunction with the *nād*. This difference piggybacks another difference: Kalbeliya *nāds* always have *two rudrākṣ* beads, which they claim are the testicles of

⁷⁵ My description here resembles that by D. Gold (1999: 73) of an agricultural caste of Nāth Yogīs in Ajmer District, though he does not indicate the relative wear-and-tear of such clothing. Additionally, while Kalbeliya ascetic-beggars dress so as to resemble *sādhus*, the Nāth Yogīs do not.

Śiva. Additionally, the whistle is his penis and the ring is the vagina of the Goddess. While I heard this explanation several times from several people, there are those Kalbeliyas who know nothing of this symbolism and who, upon hearing my question about this set of representations, told me to remain wary of what others had told me. Regardless of individual interpretation of its symbolic meaning, the *nāḍ* clearly identifies one as a (generally) older Kalbeliya man who either works as an ascetic beggar, has a disposition towards certain forms of Kalbeliya ritual and devotional practices, or a combination of the two.

For Bourdieu, the *habitus*, or set of dispositions regulating the relationships between improvised bodily practices in appropriate time and space, and the structured and structuring objective social field, is forgotten history turned into nature (1977: 78-9). On the subject of asceticism, Gavin Flood takes this to mean that ascetics perform the “memory of tradition” and the “ambiguity of the self” (2004: 2-8). By dressing and acting as Hindu *sādhus* – by literally performing asceticism – therefore, Kalbeliya ascetic-beggars reproduce “history,” or the memory of the appropriate relationships between ascetics and householders in rural and urban Rajasthan. The difference between these performances, and what Flood identifies as “asceticism,” is that these Kalbeliyas do not perform the “ambiguity of the self.” That Kalbeliyas do not seek to destroy their own personal subjectivity, through austerities or various other forms of more widely recognized performances of asceticism, means for many people that they are not, in fact, ascetics. However, I am not interested in the moral or religious validity of these performances, only in the strategies used. Sartorial practice, and improvised behavior of Kalbeliyas posing as Hindu *sādhus*, then, become successful socioeconomic strategies only insofar that they reproduce the memory of ascetic-householder relationships in the body of these men in such a way that their patrons too perceive these memories.

I could locate Kalbeliya male musicians (but not dancers) at the other extreme on this supposed line. Here, the colors and “traditional” quality of the ascetic-beggar’s dress is replicated, while, in conjunction with the skilled practice of the entertainment industry in Rajasthan, greater India, and abroad, the clothes worn in this setting tend to be new, clean, and pressed. These musicians do wear *bhagvā kurtās* (long, collarless, ochre-colored shirts) and ochre-colored or multi-colored turbans, but they generally wear pants instead of *dhotīs*. Although some musicians wear the *nāḍ*, this is not the norm. Additionally, the few men I knew who were split-ears (*kānpḥaṭā*), that is, who had large holes cut into the center of the cartilage in their ears, did not wear their *mudrās* during performances.⁷⁶ Many men wear the gold and jewel-studded, flower-shaped earrings popular among Rajasthani men. Furthermore, many musicians also wore dark eye-liner. If we may imagine this line to exist, with the hyper-real ascetic beggar on one end and the hyper-real musician on the other, the dress of the Kalbeliyas who shows snakes to tourists would locate him somewhere in the middle. Because these men have no employer, and are therefore not required to conform to a dress code befitting an upscale tourist restaurant or hotel, they need not wear clothes as new or as clean as the musicians. However, they are also not replicating Hindu ascetics in performance, and need not drape themselves in bodily adornments popular among ascetics. It follows, then, that while they are not as pressed as ascetic beggars to perform poverty, these seven men, nonetheless, live in relative poverty, and their

⁷⁶ Thanks to D. Gold for pointing out that the removal of *mudrās* during a performance could just be a measure of precaution: these earrings, and the cartilage through which they worn, must be protected for both reasons of both health and prestige. D. Gold (1996: 106) claims that Nāths with split-ears who tear their cartilage should sit down in *samādhī* at the very spot where his ears were torn. Although none of D. Gold’s informants remember such an incident, they do claim that anyone who did tear his cartilage would be disgraced. In Jaipur, I perceived that the *mudrās* were out of fashion among Kalbeliyas under fifty years of age. The split-eared Kalbeliyas I knew had the procedure performed in their childhood, and rarely wore their *mudrās*.

clothes are occasionally torn, burned, discolored, or in other states of disrepair. At the same time, a central strategy in showing snakes to tourists is the grabbing of their attention; ergo while the age, quality, and state of their clothing frequently resembles those of the ascetic-beggar, their brightness and “flash” effect is often similar to those of musicians. While flashy clothes are one component of this strategy, there are others as well.

Just as with Kalbeliya male ascetic-beggars, the sartorial practices of Kalbeliyas working in the tourism industry comprise a set of economic strategies in their use of history/memory, enacted in their body. These sets of skilled practice, however, draw on and create a different sense of memory. First, they are structured by and structuring of a specifically local, Kalbeliya memory of practice, in that they are generated by and generative of – in part – a Kalbeliya “public culture,” wherein men utilize certain sartorial and bodily strategies as part of the skilled practice of showing snakes. Secondly, however – and this is where this form of practice differs from that of Kalbeliya ascetic-beggars – their skilled practice also draws on and recreates a memory constrained by historical processes, with ties to colonial rule in the subcontinent and global capitalism. This second constraint on the enactment of memory in the body is a sophisticated Kalbeliya socioeconomic strategy, deployed in the tourism industry to benefit financially by catering to the desires of tourists to experience a timeless, essentialized, and traditional India. Keeping these two forms of bodily memory, generative of and generated by the skilled practice of showing snakes at City Palace, I will try to flesh this out with an ethnographic illustration.

Sitting on the sidewalk or street, dressed in such a way, these snake-charmers place their snake-filled bamboo baskets on the ground in front of them (see

Illustration 15).⁷⁷ If they are not seated in shade, the baskets might be placed inside a bag or under nearby shade. A snake that is uncomfortably hot becomes sleepy; the show of a sleepy snake is less entertaining than that of a snake that is fully awake and frightfully aware of the impending danger around it. Kalbeliyas are careful not to let the snakes overheat, lest their performances become boring. As soon as a sizable group of tourists is spotted, one or more men will start to play one of four or five regionally – and in some cases, nationally – recognized Kalbeliya songs on their *bīns*, generally made popular through Kalbeliya Dance Parties.⁷⁸ The remaining men prepare the snakes to be shown, by opening their baskets and waking the snakes, lightly tapping them under their heads. Once aroused, the snake lifts its head out of the basket and may, depending on its excitement, flare its hood. While those men play the *bīn*, they wave it in circles, hence also waving its long metal pipe, used for tuning the instrument, in front of the snake. Men not playing the *bīn* may also shake and sway their closed fist in front of its face. An excited snake watches both actions attentively, occasionally striking either the hand or the metal pipe, a provocation intended to scare and entertain the crowd. During this performance, men who are not playing the *bīn* tell the group of tourists, in broken English, that the “friendly” snake is not poisonous. This same man, a spokesperson of sorts, often invites certain members of the audience, who seem particularly intrigued by the show, to sit down beside the man playing the *bīn*. If the audience member does so, a turban is placed on his or her head

⁷⁷ This account may be contrasted with that given by Robertson (1996: 116-17) of begging at the City Palace complex, from which my account has notable differences. For example, her three paragraph description claims that only one Kalbeliya man sits in any given place at a time. Similarities include the men’s attempts at remaining in the shade and at not bothering tourists.

⁷⁸ There is a notable exception. By far the most recognizable snake-charming song (for Indians, that is), “Man Dole Mera,” was written for and popularized by a famous Bombay film entitled “Nagin” (1954; literally “female cobra”).



Illustration 15. Kālūnāth's *bīn* on top of his snake basket. Photo by Yasmine Singh.

and a *bīn* in his or her hand. The Kalbēliya spokesman encourages the other audience members to take photos of this spectacle. After one or two minutes of such a performance, the Kalbēliya men ask the crowd for money. Of the phrases used to do so, the most frequently repeated is, “As you like, give me money.”

Sutton (2006: 91-92) describes “skilled practice” as the use and adaptation of the mind/body and its extensions in a changing environment. Skilled practice is result of an education of memory of the body and the senses in relation to the actor’s environment. While the skilled practice of showing snakes to tourists is certainly similar in many ways to that of showing snakes – as my informants say – in the “village” and in the “alleyways,” it diverges from these practices as well. While these

men ask repeatedly, and occasionally request more than what is originally given, they make a point not to pester the tourists. On one level, this is a begging strategy, attempting to spread the “good name” of Kalbeliya snake-charmers among the friends of the tourists, who my informants are certain will inevitably hear the tales of their snake-show and see their pictures. Yet, this is also a safeguard against possible threats posed to their ability to sit in such a prized place within the City Palace complex. To ensure the complex remains traveler-friendly, a force of police has been assigned the task of wandering around, saving tourists from bothersome vendors, harassment, and theft. These police come around whenever a large crowd gathers, particularly when those comprising the crowd appear to be Indian (they may in fact be visiting Indians settled abroad). Because snake-charming is illegal in India, Kalbeliyas have no guarantee that they will not suffer harassment or arrest at the hands of these police. The Kalbeliyas who show snakes at the City Palace, therefore, take three preemptive measures against such possible harm. First, as indicated above, they do not pester the tourists for money. The attitude of these men generally replicates what Kālūnāth Aṭhvāl once told me:

Just like in begging, not all tourists give; not all tourists like what we do. Those people who like it watch, take pictures, and then they will give. If all day one hundred tourists walk by without taking pictures, then we won’t beg anything from anyone. We only ask (*māṃgnā*) for money from those who take pictures. If they are going to give, then they should give – we aren’t forcing anyone to do anything.

The second precaution taken by these men is to show their snakes only to large groups of foreign tourists. Many Indian tourists who walk by these seated men are denied their requests for a show. While they may open their baskets to show the snakes to

Indian tourist families with children, Kalbeliyas explain their denials of such request by claiming both that the police will bother them under these circumstances, and that Indian tourists never give them any money. The final strategy which Kalbeliyas employ to circumvent antagonistic encounters with police is through bribes. The Kalbeliyas collectively give money each week to these police officers, who, in return, do not arrest them or make them leave. Still, there are other individuals whom the Kalbeliyas variously call forester *vālās* and *saṁsthān vālās*, or people working for a forest wildlife protection agency. These individuals infrequently take Kalbeliyas to the police station, where many of my informants have been fined for the possession of illegally trapped and kept animals. More often these *saṁsthān vālās* take the snakes away from Kalbeliyas, obstructing their ability to earn the very necessary money they would have earned on that given day.

The skilled practice of showing snakes to tourists at City Palace, enacting memories of both the Kalbeliya as ascetic-beggar and as an image of essentialized, “traditional” India, marketable to tourist demands, thus creates new sites of power in which these Kalbeliyas must utilize new strategies of negotiating dominance and resistance. Referring to the relationships between ritual practice and such negotiations, Catherine Bell argues that power relations are “mastered” within the body, and domination and resistance are negotiated in actions utilizing strategies of ritualization and differentiation (1992: 182, 196, 204). In her account, which fuses the writings of Gramsci with those of Kenelm Burridge, the “redemptive hegemony” of practice, never concrete or singular, is found in “a strategic and practical orientation for acting, a framework possible only insofar as it is embedded in the act itself” (1992: 85). Ortner warns that the social reproduction of domination and hegemony in practice is “never total, always imperfect, and vulnerable to the pressures and instabilities inherent in any situation of unequal power” (2006: 7). Furthermore,

resistance to domination is always available in certain cultural forms (2006: 15). However, to understand how and in which respects “resistance” is culturally available, I turn to the question of “agency.”

Academic portrayals of “resistance” to or “negation” of power-structures are generally accompanied by an implicit or explicit view of “agency.” Mahmood (2001) and Asad (2003), however, propose a break with such theoretical preoccupations. Mahmood claims that these theoretical paradigms read resistance and self-empowerment into contexts where women seem to be acting to secure their place of subjugation in male-dominated hierarchies (2001: 206). Agency as “resistance,” Asad writes, is supported ideologically by secularist notions of the “essential freedom” and the “natural sovereignty, of the human subject” (2003: 71). These latent notions falsely assume that action indicates desire and intention (2003: 72-3). Mahmood finds agency “not so much in the intentionality of the actor, but in the relationships that are articulated between words, concepts, and practices that constitute a particular discursive tradition” (2001: 209). Following Judith Butler, Mahmood describes agency as a “capacity for action that specific relations of *subordination* create and enable” (2001: 210, emphasis in original). However, she diverges from Butler’s theory by locating agency in “capacities and skills” for specific action, and “as ineluctably bound up with historically and culturally specific disciplines through which a subject is formed” (*ibid*). Importantly, agency can only be identified in the “particular networks of concepts that enable specific modes of being, responsibility, and effectivity” (2001: 212). Asad similarly notes that the cultural meaning exists in “semantic and institutional networks that define and make possible particular ways of relating to people, things, and oneself” (2003: 78-9). Both authors point to the ways in which agents act creatively in situations, and under conditions, over which they have no control. Importantly, agentive actions can reproduce “continuity, stasis, and stability”

(Mahmood 2001: 212), and act “without aiming at self-empowerment” (Asad 2003: 98).⁷⁹ These texts lead me to several conclusions regarding the creative and agentic responses to power-structures. First, in what follows, I will not be concerned with individual Kalbeliyas seeking self-empowerment; nor will I ask about attempts to exist beyond hierarchies. As was claimed before and will be clear below, the strategies with which Kalbeliyas engage with hierarchies are structured by networks of power and inequality.

New Structures of Power

The first instance of new power structures builds on the above discussion of police and wildlife protection advocates, or *samshtān vālās*. I once participated in a run-in between Harjīnāth Kālvār-vāle and one of these *samshtān vālās*. One Saturday, Yasmine Singh and I had gone to City Palace for the day. While Yasmine talked to various other people, I sat with Harjīnāth, watching him work and discussing his community. During our conversation, a man walked up, opened the basket placed on

⁷⁹ Building on and departing from Mahmood and Asad, Keane’s work describes the ways in which agency was argued over, and used in indictments against opponents for fetishism, in the encounter between Dutch Calvinist missionaries, Sumbanese converts, and Sumbanese ancestor-ritualists (2007). Keane’s interest in agency is tied closely to what he calls the “moral narrative of modernity” (2007: 47-55, 73, 131). Responding to Fabian’s (1983) critique of anthropology’s denial of its coeval objects of study, Keane connects the scholarly dialogues regarding agency and modernity with the social world of his informants, which is itself fraught with contestations over who is, and who is not, an agent and modern. Central to both discussions – anthropological and Dutch/Sumbanese – are discourses and practices that value certain relationships between words, material objects, and humans, over others. Resisting the tendency to develop a theorized model for comprehending agency, Keane gives the reader detailed illustrations of how “agency” is conceived and used in several examples. It seems to me that Keane’s strategy – to continually point to the crystallization, contestation, and reformulation of the concept – reveals the nonexistence of “agency” apart from the discourses and practices which bring it into play.

the sidewalk in front of Harjīnāth, and lifted up the snake. Paying little heed to this man, Harjīnāth grabbed the snake from this man, returned it to the basket, and continued to talk to me. When the man tried to do it again, Harjīnāth told him not to touch the snake. This man introduced himself as someone from the wildlife *saṃsthān*, and told Harjīnāth to come with him to the police station (*thānā*). I jumped up and asked the man if he was a police officer. When he answered my question by informing me of the Kalbeliyas' inhumane treatment of snakes, I repeated my question. Angry, I told him that, if he was not a police officer, he had no business demanding Harjīnāth go anywhere, let alone the police station. In this commotion, he stepped aside to call his agency's office. I turned to Harjīnāth and told him to leave. I would call him in fifteen minutes and we could resume our conversation elsewhere. After Harjīnāth left, the man returned to where Yasmine and I were sitting, asking where Harjīnāth had gone. I pointed in the opposite direction and told him he had gone that way. Half an hour later, Yasmine and I went to the Sītā-Rām temple in Choṭī Chaupar, another famous tourist site, just down the street from City Palace in Jaipur's old city. We sat with Harjīnāth and the other beggars, with whom Harjīnāth was friends, for the rest of the afternoon. While Harjīnāth repeatedly told me that I had saved him his day's earnings, and the earnings of the next few days, which he would otherwise have had to spend searching for a new snake, this was not the reaction of the other men who work at City Palace. The reaction of the others tended to indicate that this *saṃsthān vālā* would not have actually taken Harjīnāth to jail; he would have only taken his snake away, an easily replaceable commodity.

Our narrative has three actors: Harjīnāth, the *saṃsthān vālā*, and me. While Harjīnāth and I were talking, before approaching us, the *saṃsthān vālā* had walked by with another man and a little girl, and had stared at us. Before the incident, he walked back by us several times, and stared again. When he finally approached us, he spoke in

Hindi and in English. Because of his survey of the scene before approaching us, and because of his use of English in a context involving one foreigner and several other men who were visibly lower class men – there were also two street vendors and a beggar there with us – his actions may be characterized as utilizing strategies for the acquisition from me of symbolic capital by attempting to subjugate Harjīnāth by physically controlling the materials of Harjīnāth's skilled practice. This two-fold endeavor was met with two reactions. First, Harjīnāth resisted the *saṁsthān vālā's* attempt at subjugation through the control of his materials. Secondly, I denied his attempts at exchange of symbolic capital by continuing to focus on Harjīnāth. When his initial attempts at wielding power and exchanging symbolic capital were denied, the *saṁsthān vālā* switched strategies. Here, he attempted to exploit his higher-class status and prestige over Harjīnāth by demanding he go with him to the police station. This second attempt was denied by my increasingly aggressive behavior towards him. I used my symbolic power – greater than his in the context of the City Palace, home of the tourist; strengthened by use of the Hindi language to confront him – to strategically attempt to control this situation, dominate the *saṁsthān vālā*, and create a window of opportunity for Harjīnāth. However, this was also an attempt to dominate Harjīnāth, as I was fighting his battle. My attempt, then, had two reactions. First, the *saṁsthān vālā* resisted my attempts at domination by arguing with me – attempting to persuade me of his right to act over Harjīnāth's – and then by calling his office, thereby bringing a higher authority into our conflict. When he did call his office, I told Harjīnāth to leave. This was the second reaction to my attempts at power.

Harjīnāth's departure, however, was no simple acquiescence to my attempts to control: he resisted this domination by strategically allowing me to think that I had. This resulted in my psychological exchange, whereby I felt good about myself for

having given a gift to Harjīnāth.⁸⁰ In relation to my arguments in the previous section, Harjīnāth is adept at understanding the desires of tourists, and marketing his skilled practices accordingly. In this case, however, Harjīnāth did not stand to benefit financially from allowing me to conduct such an exchange. Contrarily, the exchange was to be symbolic. Because the Kalbeliyas among whom I conducted fieldwork gave value to friendships with foreigners – most of them are in the tourism industry – Harjīnāth could gain social capital, in the form of prestige, from a continued relationship with me. That this is true is evidenced in the reactions of other Kalbeliyas to my telling of the narrative of this event. While I attempted to exchange this narrative for my own symbolic capital, others repeatedly told me that Harjīnāth was in no real danger in the situation. Hence, that which I traded with myself for a sense of moral accomplishment was actually created by Harjīnāth's strategic practice. The real “winner” in this strategic battle for power was thus Harjīnāth.

This narrative played out the way it did specifically because of its historical location in which a more local Kalbeliya “public culture” is engaged in a relationship of power and contention with global capitalist, post-colonial processes. The possibilities of this narrative lie in these connections: a discourse about animal rights, notions of citizen responsibilities to enforce state laws protecting these animal rights, and a knowledge of English were all contributing factors in the practice of the *saṃsthān vālā*. That I was present and researching Kalbeliyas was also conditioned by these processes, although in more ways than I have space to delineate. Finally, because of his location in these relationships between historical and cultural fields,

⁸⁰ In delineating its impossibility, Derrida undermines the conditions of a “free gift,” that is, a gift that is not exchanged (1992: 1-14). Among these, one condition of the free gift's possibility is that the donor must not see the gift as a gift, and hence must not see herself as a donor. For, even if the gift is not reciprocated with another, the donor will psychologically exchange the gift for a sense of having done something of moral value (1992: 13).

Harjīnāth has developed strategies for improvising these types of situations, at once global and local in scope and character.

Yet, the police and the *saṁsthān vālās* are not the only groups of people to threaten the pride of place at City Palace for showing snakes. The group of men who show snakes there disallows other individuals to do the same. I will give one example here to illustrate this point. Harjīnāth Colony-vāle, in his late forties or early fifties during the period of my fieldwork, had been showing snakes to tourists since his early twenties (see Illustration 16). Although he was the only brother in his family to have graduated from twelfth grade (he was very high in his class!), he had trouble finding work after school. As a temporary solution to unemployment, Harjīnāth began wandering around the villages, showing snakes and begging as an ascetic. When a job opened up at City Palace, he was allowed to join the force, and has been showing snakes there every since. Kālūnāth, one of his younger brothers, had worked odd jobs after leaving school upon the completion of the fifth grade: he worked construction, operating machinery in a potato chips factory, and sold women's adornments in his village. After Kālūnāth's wedding, however, he eventually moved to Jaipur and started driving a cycle-rickshaw. Soon after their wedding, Kālūnāth's wife, Jānkī, became ill, and had to spend a lot of time in the hospital. Kālūnāth soon realized that his earnings from driving a cycle-rickshaw would not cover her medical expenses. Like any good older brother would, Harjīnāth attempted to bring Kālūnāth into the fold at City Palace. The others, however, worried about a decrease in their own earnings, did not agree to having Kālūnāth join them. Paṭṭūnāth, Harjīnāth Kālvāṛ-vāle, Jagdīśnāth, and Kailāśnāth were all already working there regularly. Harjīnāth Colony-vāle occasionally took Kālūnāth along, but the others would scare him away. Still, Kālūnāth was insistent and patient. He started to spend more time at City Palace, and acted respectfully to the others. He bought them tea and *bīṛīs* (Indian cigarettes, rolled with



Illustration 16. Harjīnāth Colony-vāle. Photo by Carter Higgins.

tobacco leaves instead of paper), and make frequent gifts of liquor to the others. Eventually, after four or five months of persistence and bribes, they agreed to allow Kālūnāth to work with them. The time of my fieldwork was the thirteenth year Kālūnāth had worked at City Palace. Hence, the competition among Kalbeliyas for the opportunity to show snakes in a global capitalist environment is contended with through strategies common to a more local, Kalbeliya “public culture.”

Kālūnāth’s struggle with the others at City Palace over the opportunity to work among them seems like a simple instance of negotiating economic competition.

Hence, the first move in the analysis of this situation may be to contrast this capitalistic competition with the representations of the economic practices of itinerant Kalbeliyas in chapter three. There, we read memories of egalitarian, internally socialistic forms of economic redistribution. By engaging in the new forms of skilled practice at City Palace, Kalbeliyas seem to have adapted modern configurations of political economy and completely parted with their remembered forms of socioeconomic behavior. However, their capitalist enterprises are negotiated through culturally strategic actions. For example, the attempts of the other men at City Palace to maintain dominance over Kālūnāth, by chasing him away from City Palace, were countered by Kālūnāth's strategic actions, which resisted these attempts, and eventually established a powerful persuasion of its own over the others. This was accomplished using strategies (mis)recognized by a Kalbeliya "public culture." While the first example, of Hārjīnāth Kālvār-vāle's run-in with the American and the *saṃsthān-vālā*, saw a reconfiguration of local and global power relations, this example shows how historical global power relations and local power relations (engagement in capitalist competition) are negotiated through local-culturally strategic practice (attempts at chasing Kālūnāth away from City Palace, and Kālūnāth's eventual persuading of the other men).

Undoubtedly, had Kālūnāth attempted to join the crew at City Palace more recently than he did, he likely would have been given permission due to the influence of his older brother Hārjīnāth Colony-vāle, who perhaps possesses more power of persuasion than any of the others. As stated above, whenever he works, Hārjīnāth always sits in the private entrance to the City Palace, in front of the upscale, tourist restaurant, "The Palace Café." While the above description of the daily activities of these seven men at City Palace seems to suggest a total break from Kalbeliya memories of snake-services presented in the previous chapter, and particularly from

Kothari's characterization of Kalbeliyas as ritual specialists (Bharucha 1003; 53-54), the strategies used during these daily activities draw from a repertoire of strategies common to both these men and Kalbeliya ascetic-beggars. The story of how Harjīnāth acquired such prestige, and the right to sit where he does, inside the "inner-space" of snake-showing at City Palace, will serve as a useful illustration of this repertoire.

The following is my compilation and condensation of several narratives I heard of the initiation of Harjīnāth's esteemed position. Eight to ten years prior to the period of my fieldwork, the queen of Jaipur, Her Highness Shri Gayatri Devi Sahiba, consulted a Brahman regarding the future success of some endeavor. The Brahman told the queen that, if she wanted this undertaking to be successful, then she required the help of Śiva. Hence, she should find a *saṃperā* and feed milk to a black cobra, a form of worship of Śiva. The queen agreed and told one of her workers to find a *saṃperā* who could supply her with a snake. This was during the summer, and the only Kalbeliya at City Palace was Harjīnāth. The manager brought Harjīnāth into the palace and to the queen. She told Harjīnāth what the Brahman had told her, and asked Harjīnāth if he was willing to help. Because Kalbeliyas officiate Śiva worship with their snakes for anyone in need, he agreed. After the queen fed milk to the snake, she told Harjīnāth that she needed to go to Delhi for the task at hand. If the outcome was desirable, she told Harjīnāth, then she wanted him to come to her everyday. When she returned, after successfully completing her task, she had her worker fetch Harjīnāth again, who officiated Śiva worship via the snake a second time. The queen then asked Harjīnāth to return on a daily basis. In an instance of great cunning, Harjīnāth told her that he had to travel a long way to the City Palace from his village, and that he was doing this at his own expense, receiving only *milk-money* from the queen! If he were to come back, he would need some place to show his snakes to tourists, so that he could feed his children. The queen agreed and gave him his spot

inside the private entrance, directly in front of the “The Palace Café.” During the period of my fieldwork, Harjīnāth earned more money than any of the other men who work at City Palace. Not only does Harjīnāth play the *bīn* for and show snakes to the tourists on their way into the upscale restaurant, he also sells brightly decorated, toy-like *bīns*, which he, Kālūnāth, and Paṭṭūnāth make out of coconuts.⁸¹ Hence, the most successful snake-charmer at City Palace obtained the possibility of becoming that by way of skilled practice uncharacteristic of showing snakes to foreigners. This account complements the fact that these men, whose everyday activities do not include those of the ritual specialist, do, at certain times and in certain spaces, utilize strategies of ritualization. This is possible because their skilled practice draws from a repertoire of skilled bodily practice is deployed strategically in different environments for different ends.

Harjīnāth’s encounter with Her Highness Shri Gayatri Devi Sahiba is an instance in which old strategies are used for new ends. In this account, unlike the former two examples, there are no explicit attempts at domination. Instead, we see that Harjīnāth strategically maneuvered in this exchange, using the relative power inscribed in his position as ritual specialist, to persuade the queen to give him a gift. Achieved in a such way, Harjīnāth secured a new space of power, the private entrance to the City Palace. Having done as much, Harjīnāth initiated a new structure of power, in which he possess both more symbolic capital than the others at City Palace, but also the opportunity to reap more financial benefit from this occupation. As in the first two examples, the possibilities of his actions were created and resulted in a combination of local and global public cultures at a certain point in history. However, this narrative also underscores the role played by chance and improvisation in response to it. The

⁸¹ In fact, if you search “Google images” for “snake charmer Jaipur,” Harjīnāth’s photo is the most frequent.

queen of Jaipur, a thoroughly modern woman, engaged in multiple capitalist and global endeavors, sought the help of a locally authoritative ritual specialists (the Brahman), who recommended she utilize the specialties of a Saṃperā. By chance,⁸² Harjīnāth happened to be available and willing to aid the queen in her task. Through his fulfillment of her ritual needs, and the successful accomplishments of her task, Harjīnāth acquired divine and royal blessings in using a strategically located and culturally powerful space for the global capitalist re-memorialization of “traditional India” into his body.

Taken together, these three ethnographic accounts complement the previous section of this paper, which focused on the skilled practice of showing snakes to tourists at City Palace as strategically rewriting new memories into their bodies. It does so because it indicates the creation and reproduction of – and resistance to – structures of power, a loose hegemony, in the body related to space and time. These new memories locate Kalbeliyas in both new and familiar power structures, which they negotiate with strategies also new and familiar, to achieve desired ends. Although these negotiations are not always successful, and never final, they do allow a glimpse at some of the historical changes which have affected and been affected by certain members of the Kalbeliya caste-community.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to use “memory” in the second sense delineated in the second chapter of this thesis, as bodily memory structured by and structuring the skilled practice of showing snakes to tourists in the City Palace complex. Because snake-charming in this context is marketed towards tourists desiring an encounter

⁸² The English phrase “by chance” is quite popular among Kalbeliyas in Jaipur. It makes sense to me that I should also use it, at least once.

with an ancient, essentialized, and “traditional India,” of Orientalist discourse, the men working at City Palace must create new bodily memories, ones that create an image for this encounter. After describing how these new bodily memories are constructed, this chapter has attempted to draw out some of the new power structures and trajectories of strategy which are utilized in this new environment. By prefacing these discussions with a short account of loss of jobs in the tourism industry in other contexts, this chapter seeks to form part of a discussion with the previous chapters on Kalbeliya memories and representations of the past. This dialogue will continue in the conclusion to the thesis.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION: THEORY AND PRACTICE IN CASTE-COMMUNITY

In the previous chapters, I attempted to place several themes from my interviews next to one another, so that I might here explore the relationships between them. Among these topics, which I refer to as “class two” are: temporalities, place, material culture, memory, strategic improvisation, body, representation, argumentation, and skill. My proposal is that the connections between all of the motifs in class two indicate something theoretically useful byway of two larger academic discussions, here referred to as “class one,” and in which I might locate this conclusion – those examining caste (i.e. Indology), and those dealing with the associations of actors with social structures (i.e. Social Theory). Class two, then, consists of conceptions regarding collectives, individuals, and human relationships. To call to mind the two discussions in class one: according to the literature review in the introduction, the central, intellectual concerns with caste in South Asia are hereditary hierarchy, colonial reification, and postcolonial change. As for social theory, the way I approached the generation of socially educated individuals and cultural field relied heavily on the mediation between the two by the *habitus*, a set of dispositions acquired through experience, structured by and structuring the social field, and enabling agents to act in strategic and improvisational ways with respects to their environments. I would like to dwell here on how my use of those topics in class two may contribute to a broader understanding of class one, that is, of Kalbeliya caste-community and practice. However, I will first say more about the constituents of class one.

The larger claim to be made, referenced in the introduction to this thesis, is the utility of a conflation of the necessarily ambivalent categories in class one: “caste” and “community.” The meanings of both of these terms are equivocal, contingent on the

specific, historical circumstances of the conversations in which they are deployed. Moreover, their counterparts in Hindi are just as imprecise; my informants used them separately, interchangeably, and paired together. The insistence on following Kalbeliya characterizations of the social world is not only an attempt to take seriously their sophisticated knowledge. By reproducing their nebulous identification of this or that caste, and this or that social, ritual, or political community, I would like to suggest a corollary consideration for both social theory and Indology. Within the academy, the days of an inherited and fixed “caste system” have been over for some time; it will not be sufficient here to merely critique this dated sociological model for caste. What I have in mind, then, is to review the arguments advanced in this thesis, but framed in such a way that they may be taken as a contextualized instance of how caste-community may be sustained, re-imagined, and re-presented. I do this by showing how I have connected the themes from class two to my discussion of class one, which may now be glossed simply as an analytical understanding of “caste-community.”

Chapter three offered Kalbeliya memories of itinerancy and semi-itinerancy, and proposed some ways in which these can serve as the ideological justification for various arguments regarding the present and future of the caste-community. *Places* such as villages, the jaṅgal, pilgrimage sites, and the city; *temporalities* including remembered and represented general pasts; *material objects* – tents, musical instruments, and animals; all of these were woven together into a fabric of meaning which enveloped human relationships. Or, to put in more simply, I endeavored to locate the constitution of caste-community in class two themes, drawn from my interviews. The memories of begging strategies given in chapter four similarly compounded place, time, and material objects with individuals and relationships. On one level, then, chapters three and four document an imagining of the Kalbeliya caste-community – class one – by means of transmitted relationships between humans,

places, temporalities, and material objects – class two. Each of these chapters, however, presents another method by which the caste-community sustains and is sustained by actors. In chapter three, individual Kalbeliyas creatively exploit this fabric of relations, using it to argue for certain visions of the direction of the caste-community. Some of these arguments, drawing from certain configurations of “conjoined repertoires” – those of a local, Kalbeliya “public culture,” and those of a global, postcolonial character – envisioned a future in which Kalbeliyas might take initiatives in English-medium education, and thereby have greater access to global capitalist markets. Others, however, arranged these conjoined repertoires differently, simultaneously valorizing settled residence and Kalbeliya occupations associated with the past. If the caste-community is sustained in the first example by shared constructions of meaningful relations between place, time, humans, and material culture, then the caste-community is reproduced in this second example precisely in the act of arguing about it. It is in the process of debate that the Kalbeliya caste-community continues to mean. Because argumentation is also a constituent member of class two, this again is an instance in which themes from class two are used in the reproduction of caste-community.

The distinctiveness of chapter four is its emphasis on remembered strategies of differentiation. Kalbeliya forms of begging have figured into my exploration of caste-community because of their utilization of repertoires of practice shared by various individuals in circumstances unrelated to begging. Hence, chapter four opens up two cases of the reproduction of caste-community and actor, both of which exhibit applications of class two: the relations between strategy and repertoire, and the memorial connections between contemporary and remembered, *pāramparik* (“traditional”) practice – a kind of genealogy of repertoire in which actors consciously place themselves. In the first, we see that skilled, bodily practices existed on something

like a pendulum, encouraging certain interpretations of action in relation to place and time, while deemphasizing others. By exploiting his or her anticipation of patronly expectation and reception, the Kalbeliya beggar was able to maneuver among patrons with greater or lesser success. It shall be recalled that strategic, improvised practice is not a set of rules, but is associated with the habitus, and hence is both learned through experience and reproductive of caste-community. However, because an increasingly small number of Kalbeliyas actually worked as beggars during the period of my fieldwork, we can see that: a) practice is not *always* reproductive of every aspect of caste-communities; yet b) individuals do tend to reproduce the Kalbeliya caste-community, albeit in different ways.

This leads me to my second point regarding chapter four. The repertoires of begging strategies are part of a genealogy of contemporary practice even for those Kalbeliyas with no interest in begging. For example, dance in both weddings and Kalbeliya Dance Parties are connected with the remembered begging practices associated with Holī. Additionally – and this brings us into the material covered in both chapter five and the appendix – the begging strategies of men, both of ritualization and of entertainment, are carried over into the skilled practice of showing snakes to tourists. Due to discursive reasons, the genealogy of snake-showing repertoire, unlike that of dance, is not as readily indicated by actors. Still, chapter four presents three examples of the use of class two themes in the production of caste-community. As with chapter three, chapter four sees the relations between time, place, and material objects in the presented memories as both relating individuals to one another and utilized to imagine the Kalbeliya caste-community. Next, begging strategies depend for success on the correct use of the body and its accoutrements in relation to time, place, and patronly expectations. Strategic practice relies on the habitus, part of which is a naturalization of the caste-community in the body. Each

instance of strategic improvisation is therefore also a reproduction of the caste-community. Finally, the habitus, consulted in instances of strategic begging practice, is not a static set of rules, but more like a “feel for the game,” where the game is the social world (Bourdieu 1990: 61). In *skilled practice*, such as showing snakes or dance, a repertoire of bodily movements becomes bodily memory, which can then be used in improvisational and creative ways. Another way to think of this is that, in creative, improvisational, skilled practice – showing snakes, begging, dancing – Kalbeliyas are acting with a structured agency, which in turn reproduces the caste-community. In these three instances, relationships between the components of class two play a vital role in agents’ abilities to engage the caste-community.

Strategy and genealogy of repertoire are carried over into chapter five, which characterized the skilled practice of showing snakes to tourists at City Palace in Jaipur as bodily memory. Here, I argued that Kalbeliya men enact new memories in their bodies by drawing from “conjoined repertoires” – one specific to local Kalbeliya begging practice, the other that inherits global, postcolonial, and capitalist modes of representation and being. Put differently, individuals educated by the caste-community are confronted by a new class two, whose elements are both external to the caste-community, and created in a moment of unequal power. Existing strategies and dispositions – of Kalbeliya class two – are negotiated with those *translated* from different genealogies of repertoire *into* and *by means of* Kalbeliya class two. This further situates the constitution of caste-community within its historical and sociopolitical environment. A coeval effect this has on individuals is the creation – in the body – of new and dynamic power contestations, as well as strategies of resistance and mediation. The latter, too, combine pools of conjoined repertoires – Kalbeliya and global class two’s – that are imagined and deployed in various and competing ways.

Taken together, I have presented configurations of the relationships between caste-community and what I have called “class two”: temporalities, place, material culture, memory, strategic improvisation, body, representation, argumentation, and skill. In the examples given, the individual is produced by and reproductive of the caste-community through his or her engagement with every theme (and more) from class two. Here, theory (class one) and data (from which I have accumulated class two) can scarcely be divorced from one another, because the subjects and methods of my analysis have coincided to produce my narrative of the Kalbeliya caste-community. In a negative sense, with respect to Indology, this means that discussions of “caste,” devoid of an on-the-ground view, will fail to grasp the fragility of this term. In social theory, similarly, explorations of group, power, or practice without historical or ethnographic detail cannot grasp the enmeshed and multiple meanings produced by the relationships between myriad individuals and their environments. This is so because of the simultaneous significance of structure and difference in the processual unfolding of history, produced by creative, constrained actors and chance.

Finally, the Kalbeliya caste-community isn’t created in only those ways which I have attempted to describe. Individuals are related to the Kalbeliya caste-community at every second of every day in different, shifting, and complex and complicated ways. My attempts have been to single out a few of these processes and to describe them in historically and socially embedded ways, while yet recognizing the limitations of the endeavor.

APPENDIX

THE NEW CALENDAR

Meeting the demands of the tourism industry, the bodily memories enacted by showing snakes at City Palace are different from those enacted in the bodies of Kalbeliya snake-charmers who work as ritual specialists for and entertainers of local audiences (see chapters four and five). By this I mean that the Kalbeliyas who show snakes to tourists at City Palace create new memories in their body, of essentialist and Orientalist notions of a timeless and ancient Rajasthan, catering to the demands of the tourism industry for images and experiences of “traditional” and ancient “India.” These new bodily memories, however, produced by and producing such skilled practice, draw from the same repertoire as do those in contexts similar to those described in chapter five of the thesis; therefore, Kalbeliyas who show snakes to tourists at City Palace are also able to refashion their practice in more ritualized contexts. In this appendix, I attempt to indicate this repertoire by describing the contrasts and overlaps between the occupational-cum-ritual calendar of the Kalbeliyas in and around Jaipur. While the seasonal concerns of Kalbeliya beggars and semi-itinerants, focused on the rural settings in which they work, center predominantly on the periods of agricultural harvest and surplus, Kalbeliya socioeconomic practices in the tourist industry are organized around the tourist season in Rajasthan.

In my informants’ estimation, the Hindu calendar starts with the month of Cet (Sanskrit: Chaitra). Starting in this month, and continuing through the next two months, Besāk (Skt: Vaiśākh) and Jeṭh (Skt: Jyēṣṭh), Kalbeliya beggars make their rounds in the villages, because harvest season begins in Cet, and lasts three months. One of two Hindu festivals known as Navrātra (“nine nights”) occurs during Cet, during which Kalbeliyas in Jaipur travel to the Goddess temple in Amer, just outside

Jaipur. Here, they show their snakes and extra-limbed cows, and the men dress as ascetics, all begging for grain. Additionally, many Kalbeliyas sacrifice goats and liquor to the goddess at temples in their home villages. The vocational season for those Kalbeliyas working in the tourist industry, however, is the opposite of this ritual and begging season. As these are the summer months, fewer tourists come to Rajasthan and hence fewer tourism-related jobs are available. After Jeṭh comes the month of Āsāḍ (Skt: Āṣāḍh), which is wedding season for Kalbeliyas. With the traveling and wedding arrangements during this time, neither beggars nor those with jobs in the tourism-industry work much during this month.

The work season for showing snakes at City Palace begins after Āsāḍ. Both beggars and men who show snakes to tourists start back work during the month of Sāvaṇ (Skt: Śrāvaṇ), which is the begging of the (supposed) monsoon season in Rajasthan. This is the month of Nāgpañcamī,⁸³ during which devotees often pay Kalbeliya men large amounts of money to set their snakes free in the *jaṅgal*. Because this is such a lucrative opportunity for Kalbeliyas, many men who do not normally deal with snakes spend time wandering around the *jaṅgal*, capturing snakes to set free on Nāgpañmī. (In this, the rainy season, snakes come out of their holes and are easier to find!) Additionally, several temples, particularly of the deity Śiva, with whom snakes are associated, sponsor Kalbeliya men to bring snakes and facilitate their *darśan* to devotees. After Sāvaṇ comes the month of Bhāduā (Skt: Bhādrapada), equally important to Hindu devotees who give money to snake-charmers, and hence equally lucrative for Kalbeliyas. The eighth, ninth, and tenth days of this month are particularly important, because they are the celebrations of three deities associated in certain ways with snakes. Janmāṣṭhamī, the eighth day, is the celebration of the birth

⁸³ For Nāgpañcamī, see Vogel (1926: 275-80), Panda (1989: 12), and Alter (1992: 136-66); for Nāth and Nāgpañcamī, see Briggs (1938: 133-39), Robertson (1998: 111-12), and Dutt (2004:16).

of Kṛṣṇa; Gogānaumi, the ninth day, is the celebration of either the birth or death of Gogājī;⁸⁴ and Tejādasmi, the tenth day, is the celebration of Tejājī.⁸⁵ During these three days, there is a large festival at the Govind Devjī (Kṛṣṇa) temple inside the City Palace compound. Up to ten Kalbeliyas from Kalākār Colony, including those who generally show snakes to tourists at City Palace, sit on cushions on the street outside of the temple, showing snakes and extra-limbed cows, begging for alms. While these celebrations are important financial opportunities for Kalbeliyas to act as ritual specialists, they are ritually less important for Kalbeliya devotion than another festival during the month of Bhāduā. During this month, many Kalbeliyas from all over Rajasthan travel to Rāmdevrā, just outside of Jaisalmer in western Rajasthan, for the festival of Rāmdevjī, the favorite deity of many Kalbeliyas.

The month following Bhāduā is Āsoj (Aśvin), which sees a continuation of snake services. This is also the begging of the season for Kalbeliya Dance Parties. The second Navrātra festival is during this month, so many Kalbeliya professionals return to Amer to repeat their activities of Cet. Again, many Kalbeliyas from Jaipur return to their home villages to make sacrifices of goats and liquor to the goddess. Following Āsoj is the month of Kārtik, during which most of the Kalbeliyas from Kalākār Colony live in tents at the Galtājī shrine just outside of Jaipur (see Śānti Devī's interview in chapter four). Kalbeliyas sit on mats on the sidewalk leading to the temple, begging with snakes, cows, images of deities, and dressed as ascetics. Many people also claimed to make money at Galtājī by allowing pilgrims and tourists to take their pictures. The men from Kalākār Colony, who show snakes at City Palace, travel back

⁸⁴ On Gogājī, a Rajput prince turned disciples of Gorakhnāth and subsequently god of snakes and snake-bites in north India, see (Vogel 1926: 263-66), Lewis (1956), Lapoint (1978), Khan (1997: 232-33), and Bhatti (2000: 43-89).

⁸⁵ On Tejājī, also a warrior-deity turned god of snakes and snake-bites, see Sarrazin (2003).

and forth between City Palace and Galtājī, where their wives and children beg during the day. At the end of Kārtik, Kalbeliyas return to Kalākār colony.

Kalbeliyas continue their business as usual during the following two months, Mīm̐sar (Skt: Mārgaśīrṣa) and Pos (Skt: Pauṣa). In Mā (Skt: Māgha), however, there is another festival for Rāmdevjī, so many people travel to Rāmdevrā, much as in Bhāduā. Additionally, many all-night parties for singing bhajans (*jāgarans*) are sponsored during this month, in honor of Rāmdevjī. The final month of the Kalbeliya ritual-cum-vocational calendar is Phāgun. As was noted in the last section of the previous chapter, Kalbeliyas remember a time when they wandered around in the alleyways and markets, the men playing music on their *bīns*, *ḍaphlīs*, and *caṅgs*, while the girls danced and begged for money. Kalbeliyas living in Kalākār Colony, however, are generally busy during this month with Dance Parties, and hence this occurs less frequently. However, all Kalbeliyas celebrate Holī, attending large bond fires in the streets. On the day following Holī, known as Dhūlandi, Kalbeliyas celebrate much the same way as other Hindu communities, covering each other with bright, colored powder. Contrary to stereotypes depicting samperās as frequent drug users, however, I noticed that Kalbeliyas in Jaipur took less marijuana than other communities. Instead, the Kalbeliyas with whom I played Holī cooked meat and drank copious amounts of alcohol.

In this calendar, one may notice the varied relationships between different components. Most notably, however, I would like to underscore two sets of differences: that between ritual holidays on which Kalbeliyas serve as ritual specialists and as devotees; and that between the vocations of begging and tourism-industry worker.

The symmetrization of the work year of Kalbeliya men showing snakes to foreign tourists in the City Palace complex with the tourist season not only organizes

the year of these men, their families, and their sociocultural practices throughout the year; it also differentiates them from Kalbeliya men who show snakes to Hindu families, as my informants say, in the “village” and “alleyways.” In fact, these men claim to have almost no vocational relationship to the latter. For example, during an interview with Bansīnāth Derāṇ, a man who dresses up as an ascetic and shows snakes to villagers in a semi-itinerant fashion, Kālūnāth briefly indicated the difference of his own work in the City Palace complex from that of Bansīnāth:

Kālūnāth Aṭhvāl: I don’t beg for alms, I work in a business.

Bansīnāth Derāṇ: Yeah, that is a business.

Carter Higgins: Oh.

Kesarnāth Makhvāṇā: He shows snakes to you people (i.e. to foreigners).

In fact, Kālūnāth, and the other seven men who show snakes to tourists at City Palace, refer to their work with the English word “business.” However, while these men claimed alterity from their ascetic-begging counterparts, they do, at certain times of the year, join in with these other Kalbeliya ascetic-beggars, showing snakes to Indians and begging in a more ritualized manner. My objective in pursuing this point is not to indicate deceit on the part of my informants. On the contrary, I find that their claims are upheld by other Kalbeliyas and, throughout most of the year, by their practice. Nevertheless, by attesting to the ritual specialization by these business-men at certain moments and in certain environments, I propose that their identities as workers in the tourist industry, and their re-memorialization of the body to market new “old”

essentialist images of Rajasthan to foreigners, is one strategic use of their larger repertoire of skilled practice. It is these strategies which these men turn to in many of their self-representations. The strategies employed by Kalbeliya ascetic-beggars in the “village” and “alleyways” also form part of this repertoire, and are indeed utilized in the right place(s) at the right time(s). In a discursive formation which valorizes one’s engagement with the tourism industry and devalues another’s engagement in practices viewed as antithetical to the imagined trajectories of one’s community, Kālūnāth’s claim of difference is strategic, not deceitful.

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